THE WORLD'S NUMBER ONE PC GAMES MAGAZINE

PC GAMER®

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STARCRAFT 2

EVERY COMBAT UNIT DETAILED!
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14 BATTLE STRATEGIES!

MAFIA II

EASY DAMES, HARD LIQUOR AND COLD BLOOD–BADA BING!

ABUSE THE FORCE!

HOW TO MOD *CALL OF DUTY* INTO AN EPIC STAR WARS SHOOTER

COVER TITLES ARE CLICKABLE!

REVIEWED!

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SETTLERS 7
ALLODS ONLINE
SILENT HUNTER 5

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JUNE 2010
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The *World of Warcraft* headset

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PC GAMER

JUNE 2010

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PLEASE NOTE

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PC GAMER®

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Craftwork

Tiger Woods wore contacts—and eventually got eye surgery—to achieve 20/15 vision. Michael Phelps wore a polyurethane swimsuit that was later banned by the Olympic committee. Baseball players keep slipping in the locker room and falling on top of steroid-filled syringes. Shenanigans like these have kept sports fans up in arms, but the solution is simple: Turn over all competitive sports to PC gamers. We're some of the most competitive people in the world, and in our games, performance-enhancing buffs are not only welcome, they're more or less *required*. And because everybody has access to the same non-testicle-shrinking "juice," PC gaming is the ultimate level playing-field—it's the gamer with the finer strategy and honed reflexes who ultimately wins the game.

But when you step onto the hypercompetitive, multiplayer battlefield of *StarCraft II*, you'll be packing one performance enhancer that only the *PC Gamer* faithful will have: this issue. On the eve of the galactic debut of *StarCraft II*, we're pumping your veins full of strategies, unit-specific details and save-your-bacon survival tips we've extracted from the beta, pro players and even Blizzard HQ itself. (And we've got plenty of dirt on *SC2*'s single-player campaign and all-new Challenge modes as well.) In these pages you'll find just the edge you need to get the drop on your opponents—no needles or funny suits required.

LOGAN DECKER
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
logan@pcgamer.com

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WHODUNIT

Evan Lahti
Senior Editor
Evan is the only man alive to play all the way through *Alpha Protocol*—and lived to tell the tale on page 28.

Dan Stapleton
Reviews Editor
Dan talks to renowned game designer and certifiable madman Chris Taylor about his new fantasy RTS on page 32.

Dan Fitzpatrick
Lead Designer
Dan slaved all month over a hot magazine-making machine. He's especially proud of the layout of Backspace on page 96.

Josh Augustine
Contributing Editor
We sent Josh to Iceland, but he found his way home—with an epic tale of *EVE Online*'s community event on page 56.

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Your emails, Facebooks, Twitters, and yes, we still get the occasional letter

BACK CHATTER

- Thanks for bringing back Desslock's and Andy Mahood's columns! I always enjoy reading them, even though they sometimes talk about games I would never play. ***TimW***

- The *Crysis 2* preview in the April issue was so beautiful. The way the information was organized made me :D. That is why I pay for your magazine. ***@blankgabriel3***
Stories like that one are why we make a magazine in the first place! We're glad you liked it—check for more Crysis 2 *coverage in upcoming issues.* ***PCG***

- *Battlefield: Bad Company 2* basically has the same plot as *Modern Warfare 2*, in my opinion, just with less controversial content (i.e. "No Russian"), and you don't get shot in the head and die so many times. ***Ruben Tipparach***

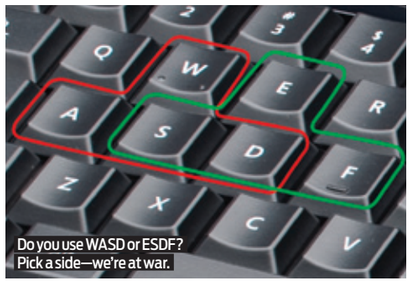
- I seem to be one of the few PC gamers left who really doesn't care about DRM measures. The only one that bothered me was *Spore*'s. ***@FIRESTORM***
You're in for a shock: Ubisoft's new always-online DRM requirements make Spore*'s limited activations look like a lenient curfew.* ***PCG***

- I loved *Silent Hunter 4* and wanted to support the series by purchasing *SH5*. But I will not support Ubisoft's new DRM.

The Tyranny of WASD

My son and I have wondered for years what brainless moron at what game company decided to limit the keyboard to the extreme left side by mapping the movement to the stupid WASD position? Using this setup is ridiculous. We long ago remapped every game we play one key to the right, using ESDF for standard movement. This gives far more usability to the keys and does not cramp your pinky-finger into a minute area. You can naturally use the A for crouching and Shift for prone, while having the Q, W and Z keys for whatever you wish. Other keys to the right are more easily reachable, for any purpose desired, and you pwn the opponents with ease. We're not pros, but we regularly score well. So let's get off the ridiculous and limiting stupidity of the *old-style* WASD, and open your parameters and your keyboards' capabilities by taking that one key step to the right.

Craig Borgman



Do you use WASD or ESDF? Pick a side—we're at war.

We almost dismissed your rant as the ravings of a heretical madman—we've been using WASD since the days of* Half-Life*—but now that we think about it, it* does *make a lot of sense to keep your left hand in the same position as when you're typing. We can't say for sure that ESDF will make all of us better gamers, but part of the beauty of the PC is being able to use the UHJK keys for movement if we want. PCG

Manual repositories

I recently bought *X-COM: UFO Defense* from the Steam store, and it did something I never thought it could do: it revived a part of me that I thought had been killed by adrenaline shooters. Suddenly, I was *thinking*! I loved the base management, the graphs, the financing. But as soon as I got to battle, I was slaughtered by a most horrific malady: I-have-no-instruction-manual-and-I'm-getting-pwned-itis! Since internet searches have turned up no manual, I was wondering if you could send me one, please?

Anonymous

We'll do one better by telling you where to get dozens of classic game manuals in PDF. Steam is actually a great resource—without even buying a game, you can view the manual via a link in the bottom of the right-hand bar of the store page. Not every game has it, but most do, including* X-COM. *GoG.com also offers complimentary PDF manuals, but you have to buy the game there first. PCG

THE HOT MAIL

Voice of reason

While Ubisoft is approaching the DRM method in a bad way, those of you who continue to pirate games are only going to make it worse. DRM doesn't stop the pirates, but don't go out and download it just to spite the publisher. Just because you aren't going to buy it now does not give anyone the right to steal it. Ubisoft watches *all* the major torrent sites, and they aren't stupid. And when they see thousands of people pirating their game, all they are going to do is beef up their DRM even more. You may think it's a battle—a war between treating consumers fairly and getting our money's worth—and to a point that's true. But we will lose out on great games because of all the piracy, because they are in control. I'd hate to see idiot pirates ruin it for all if us.

Anthony Schisler

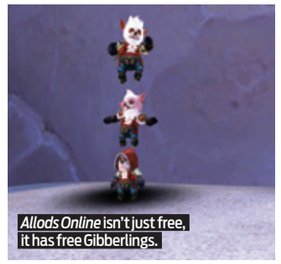
Well said, Anthony. There's never any justification for stealing a computer game—it's not going to keep the house warm or pay for your medicine, and your family isn't going to starve without it. If Ubisoft's DRM makes you mad, don't steal their game, buy another game from a publisher that treats its customers better. PCG

MMO Freeloading

I've been wondering lately… Why is it that pretty much all major MMOs insist on imposing monthly subscription fees to play? I understand that server costs for such games are expensive, but *Guild Wars*, just about the lone holdout of this trend, has been extremely successful with their expansion pack model, and without charging over $140 a year to play. One would think that someone would at least *try* to follow in NCsoft's footsteps…

Bobby Anderson

Why is it that pretty much all major MMOs insist on imposing monthly subscription fees to play?


Allods Online isn't just free, it has free Gibberlings.

***World of Warcraft** has proven that a huge number of gamers are willing to pay a monthly fee for a quality online gaming service, and now that the floodgates are opened, there's no turning back. But there are still lots of places to play online without the annoyance of a monthly fee. Our recent favorite is* **Allods Online**, *which is free to download and only charges for upgrades. PCG*

Overloaded

Regarding Logan's April 2010 Editor's Note, I think it's dangerous to assume that a gamer doesn't finish a game because of some fault in the game. Take me, for example: I have several games, which I regard highly, that I haven't yet finished. My dilemma is that there are just so *many* great games—I am literally playing 15 games at the same time and buying new games nearly every month. There just isn't enough time in the day! It took me years to finish *Baldur's Gate: Shadows of Amn* simply because I kept starting over. Would I have wanted it to be shorter? Hardly! If gamers aren't finishing games, it is important to find out the real reasons. Game on!

Jeremy Clayton

Peace and quiet

Thank you for covering games and companies like *Galactic Civilizations II* from Stardock. I bought a copy in the store, partly because of how awesome it is and partly because of your notes on their copy protection and company policies. It installed fully to my hard drive, works great and doesn't bother me (apart from the whole "Aaah, I stayed up until 2 a.m. playing? Well, maybe one more turn... Aaah!" issue). ***Dr. Tyler Wright***

Too soon?

How do you feel about sequels that are released in a year or less after the first game comes out? Do you feel like they didn't spend enough time on it? I sure as hell do. I still get a little sick thinking about the puke that was *Call of Duty: World at War*. Yuck.

Michael Albertie

It depends on the sequel. Some are obviously rushed, while others (like* Left 4 Dead 2*) deliver a full game's worth of great new content, and we can't get enough of that. It's worth mentioning that* World at War *wasn't rushed out in a year—it was developed by a separate studio, Treyarch, while Infinity Ward concentrated on the* Modern Warfare *games. And c'mon, it wasn't* that *bad a game! PCG

Mass appeal

I am writing to you about your March 2010 cover. On it, you proudly state that you have an *uncensored* review of *Mass Effect 2* inside. When did you start catering to the crude humor of those miscreants who buy *uncensored editions* of movies such as *Anchorman*, *Old School* and *Superbad?* Taking a quick look at movie shelf...Oh wait, I'm one of them. Carry on, gents!

Dan Dunbar

When did you start catering to the crude humor of those who buy *uncensored editions*?

PRTSCN

Contains 100 percent of the FDA's recommended daily allowance of A. Kelly Magnum.

I took this screen during the *Guild Wars* Canthan New Years celebration when I inadvertently walked *into* a serving table. *I* am now on the menu! My repeated cries for help yielded no assistance. Good thing the tigers had just eaten! **A. Kelly Mangum**

SHOW US YOURS Take a great screenshot lately? Send it to us at letters@pcgamer.com with PRTSCN in the subject line and a description of what's going on in the body, and we might feature it in next month's issue.

BACK CHATTER

- I will be getting *AC2*, regardless of DRM, since my connection is pretty stable. ***Raymond Ly***

- I'll join the *PCG* Steam group when I can play me some *Gravy Trader* multiplayer with the editors. All of those other games interest me not. ***Bryan Emerson***

- I think it's great that you guys are getting all these servers and hosting game nights. It's making PC gamers a tighter group. ***@chrisgram612***

- I can't even count the number of times I've been screwed over by Microsoft. I'm done supporting them in any way whatsoever...except by using Windows 7. ***Ian Cameron***

- The "MMO Supertest" article in the April issue was one of the best things I've read in a while. That is exactly the kind of stuff that you normally kind of skimp on, so kudos! it was great! ***Lembcke***

WHERE WE PLAY

Play on the official *PC Gamer* community servers

Battlefield: Bad Company 2
8.17.251.133 (search "PC Gamer" in the server browser filter)

Counter-Strike: Source
207.210.252.63

ArmA 2
75.102.38.106

Garry's Mod
8.17.251.201

ART of WAR CENTRAL

Our game servers are provided by Art of War Central, *PCG*'s staff-approved hosting service. Visit **artofwarcentral.com**

www.WorldMags.net & www.aDowns.net

Learning *Monaco*

THE PLOT
One last heist. *One last job.* You and up to three player-controlled pixel-men are world-renowned thieves on the run, trying to earn asylum by doing favors (stealing stuff) for whatever nation might grant it to you.

THE SPOT
Infiltrate a mansion, a yacht, a museum—here, we're outside a casino.

POV
You share a blueprint of an entire floorplan with your team. Any objects in your line of sight are revealed—locked doors, security cameras, safes filled with gold.

PALETTE
Color as a representation of what you can see is a terrific mechanic: it's natural to want to bring color to the grayed-out areas, so careful stealth and risk-taking are equally encouraged.

GOING UP 1
Each scenario is made up of multiple floors.

COIN 2
A monetary distraction. Collect all the money in a level to earn 100-percent completion.

3 SECURITY CONSOLE
Hack it! Access surveillance cameras to reveal patrolling enemies.

4 THE PRIZE
Retrieve your objective from the main vault, then shuttle it back to your starting point to win.

5 GUARDS
They've got guns. You don't. Avoid!

6 CIVILIANS
Damned tattletales. If a bystander sees you, they'll seek out the nearest guard and bring them to your last known position.

7 LIGHTS OUT
Cutting the electricity will let you move more freely in dimly lit areas.

YOUR CREW

The Hacker
Sabotages security faster than other characters.

The Cleaner
Healer; the muscle. Can temporarily knock out guards from behind.

The Locksmith
Unlocks doors with ease, carries a smoke bomb.

The Prowler
Fast mover; can use adrenaline to sprint.

The Redhead
Walks sexily, can apply poison perfume.

Monaco

PLAYED IT Dramatic co-op and four-player heists—inside this pixelated floorplan is the best indie game we've played in 2010 ***by Evan Lahti***

INDEPENDENT GAMES FESTIVAL 2010 WINNER!

WHAT IS *MONACO*?

Pac-Man
(Maze layout, powerups, pathfinding)

+

Ocean's Eleven
(Heist plot, characters as utilities)

+

Hitman
(Infiltration, multiple routes/subobjectives)

www.WorldMags.net & www.aDowns.net

Strictly speaking, War should be riding a much redder horse.

Bible Bashing

Play one of the four horsemen in *Darksiders*

The Bible doesn't say much about filling special Wrath meters by smiting enemies, but as War (of The Four Horsemen fame) that's what you'll do in THQ's third-person action game *Darksiders*.

War is brought in to settle the dispute between the forces of Heaven and Hell. Fights aren't chocked full of nuance—much of the time, scraps boil down to waiting for the right moment to hammer a key, at which point War begins a canned, lethal animation and strips a foe of his spleen, liver or similarly important organ.

The range of weaponry and abilities on display will dispel any potential boredom with the battling system, though the sheer, gruesome impact of the hardware War uses to eviscerate his foes is enough to make players try every possible combination, from Mr. War's politely named Chaoseater sword to impractically pointy boomerangs.

Moments of exploration space out the carnage. With an existing positive reception on consoles, *Darksiders* is bound to provide simple, visceral thrills on the PC. ■

Rich McCormick

THE SPY

FABLE ERROR

The third in Lionhead's role-playing series was never expected to land on the PC, but a post on a games career website labeled "Network Programmer—*Fable III* Project," spilled the beans on a role which involves "...converting and maintaining the network code of the Xbox 360 version of *Fable III* to the PC, and enabling the Xbox 360 version and the PC version to play together." So not only is a PC version in the works, but it may be the first game in years to support cross-platform play.

SAY HALO, WAVE GOODBYE

What's probably not coming to the PC is Bungie's über-selling FPS *Halo 3*. That's mildly disappointing, as it would be polite of Microsoft to finish off the story they've told two-thirds of. Ex-Bungie employee Matt Waggle says he worked on physics and ragdoll assets for PC and Xbox 360 versions. Where is the PC version now? The Spy expects it's rotting away in some code coffin in a forgotten part of the Microsoft empire, next to the sequel to *Freelancer*. Sniff.

HOLY SIDEKICKS

The Spy can tell you that Robin has been confirmed as a character for the next *Arkham Asylum* game, revealed in that grandiose actorly way by *Everybody Hates Chris* actor Vincent Martella , who told everyone he's playing the Boy Wonder. Batman's sidekick? The Spy thinks that points towards cooperative play.

GRAND ENTRANCE

The Spy is also hearing a lot of chatter about a *Grand Theft Auto V* reveal coming this year. Speculation is that it will be announced before E3, which seems early. Given that Rockstar is working on at least two games, it feels mega-ultra early. But if there's one thing that Rockstar enjoys doing, it's shocking people. Spy out. ■

TRENDS

THREE GORGEOUS SIDE-SCROLLING INDIE PLATFORMERS

Indie developers don't care about making fashionable games—they do it for the love. If the bigger publishers are demanding nothing but strategy games and war-based FPSs, the smaller guys are making what they want to make at that time. And right now, that seems to be gorgeously inked side-scrolling platform games.

Limbo

1 You play a little boy searching for his sister in a world of limbo. This shadowy world is gorgeous and perfectly animated. You see the tyke struggle against giant spider beasts that unfold from the backdrop, hidden in the shadows that make up the scenery. Watching it in action, it looks like it's been lovingly hand-animated, just for you. *playdeadgames.com*

Mon & Bot

2 Also an ambient platform puzzle game, in this one you control two characters: a little alien who can control gravity fields and his heavy-lifting robot. Working them together, you manipulate the physics of the world, moving objects and breaking down doors, while being lulled gently to sleep by the music and night-time shading of the color palette. *blog.naver.com/imwill*

Shank

3 No ambient music here—it would only get in the way of the screams of the people you knife, shoot, chainsaw, necksnap and stomp to death. It's beautifully animated, but its focus is on letting rip a glorious bullet-orgy. *shankgame.com*

Voyaging Beyond Bridge Commander

Star Trek: Excalibur goes above and beyond the final frontier of modding

Star Trek Excalibur (stexcalibur.com) is a fan-made game of startling ambition: Originally planned as a mod for *Star Trek: Bridge Commander*, it's outgrown the 2002-vintage engine to become a full (unlicensed) game. The modders-turned-gamemakers are working on the *Star Trek* game we've all dreamed of: the one that puts us in the captain's seat of a starship.

The team behind *Excalibur* has developed its own engine tech, enabling new visual effects such as nebulae generation, physics modeling and ship model animations that *ST:BC* couldn't handle—getting the McKinley Drydock model to physically interact with ships is one of lead artist Mark Ward's proudest accomplishments. Players can explore and interact with different parts of their ship, too, making repairs or repelling boarding parties.

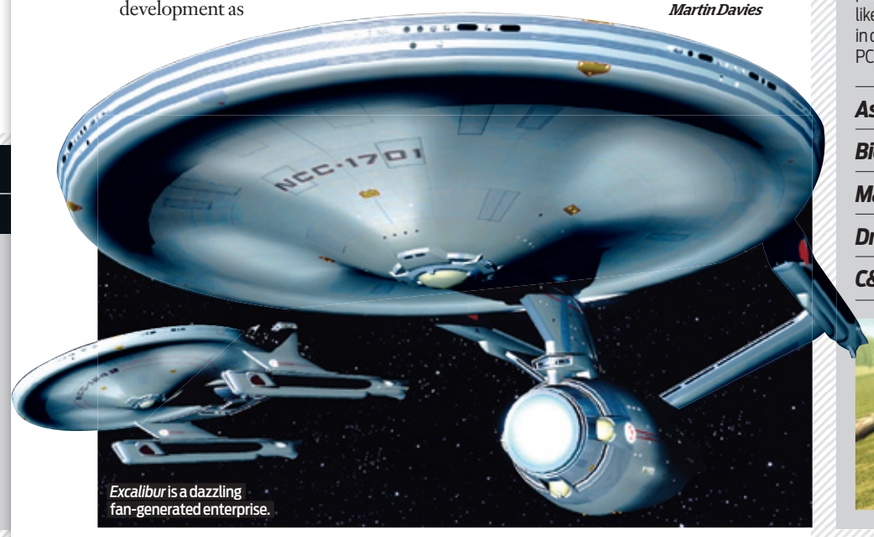
"At first, the driving force was mainly curiosity about how far I could push things," says Ward. "For a lot of us, that evolved into a desire for professional development as (the mod team members) got older and worked in related industries."

"We are trying to make everything as you see it on the show, while balancing that with what's actually possible," says Ward, referencing the game's complex behavior changes when ships go to warp or separate their saucer sections. "Whereas in *Bridge Commander* and many other space games when you jump from one system to another in a cutscene, we are aiming to have warp as just a faster method of travel, which means we can handle space battles and warp failure far more realistically."

Excalibur's team is still at work on peripheral systems, such as weaponry and content creation, and are calling for aid from fellow enthusiasts. But given the recent smiting of a noncommercial *King's Quest* fan-sequel, concern about *Excalibur*'s survival has arisen.

"Leaving *ST:BC* it was definitely a case of leaving a safe and secure home," says Ward. But with the *Trek* "Prime" universe out of the limelight, this project may escape CBS's wrath. ■

Martin Davies



Excalibur is a dazzling fan-generated enterprise.

BLOODY MIDDLE-EARTH

ANNOUNCED LORD OF THE RINGS: WAR IN THE NORTH

Warner Games just announced a new co-op action role-playing game set in the *Lord of The Rings* universe from Snowblind Studios. Unlike EA's T-rated *LOTR* adventures, early *War in the North* screenshots looks as bloody as *Dragon Age: Origins*, but with more trolls. The game will center around battles and events not shown in the films, but mentioned in J.R.R. Tolkein's novels.

TURTLES HAVE NINE LIVES

DEVELOPER TURTLE ROCK STUDIOS IS BACK IN ACTION

Here's something you don't see very often: the Orange County, California studio that started development on *Left 4 Dead* before being assimilated by Valve has now somehow disentangled itself from the Valve collective and reformed as an independent developer to work on a new, unannounced game. Our best guess: it'll be called *Right 2 Live*.

NOW PLAYING

AT THE PC GAMER WEB STORE

Ah, sweet nostalgia. Remember going to the arcade and putting a quarter into a machine to play a game? **www.pcgamer.com/store** is just like that, only better! Insert 200 quarters (or less!) in credit card form to play the latest and greatest PC gaming hits for as long as you want.

Assassin's Creed II Stabby-stabby

BioShock 2 Mo' plasmids, less problems

Mass Effect 2 Free DLC up for grabs

Dragon Age: Origins Elftastic!

C&C4: Tiberian Twilight Mobile RTS

You like horses, right? *ACII* has horses!

www.WorldMags.net & www.aDowns.net

Massive Attack

Twenty-four people, Hell Hounds and Water Elementals were killed in the making of this screenshot.

Never Good Enough

Lich King was a big step forward, but Blizzard always sees room to improve

World of Warcraft Lead Designer Tom Chilton and Lead Producer J. Allen Brack are relying on the lessons learned from the development of *Wrath of the Lich King* as they put the finishing touches on *Cataclysm*, the next expansion. Here's their take on what went wrong in *Lich King*, and how those mistakes are turning *Cataclysm* into a better game.

ON WINTERGRASP

Chilton: Wintergrasp was a success in that we've never designed large-scale world PvP that attracted any meaningful number of players…but there's always a natural downside to large-scale world PvP in that it's not necessarily going to be balanced, and you may feel insignificant in the battle.

ON PHASING

Chilton: We found that it's better to use phasing to add punctuation to important moments and where players are more likely to be playing alone, like the Goblin and Worgen starting areas.

Brack: You have to be careful. It's definitely a segmenter when it comes to storytelling in groups.

Josh Says: Limiting vehicles, smarter phasing, and bringing back classic dungeon bosses—Blizzard's taking away all the right lessons from *Lich King*.

ON VEHICLES

Chilton: Really hit or miss. It allowed for some more interesting quests than we've had in the past, but we went too far with it in some areas—the Oculus [a level 80 dungeon often criticized for confusing players with its over-reliance on vehicle mechanics. –Ed.] is a good example of that.

FAVORITE CHANGES IN *LICH KING*

Brack: I really love that we brought Onyxia back. I think the achievement system is the biggest success; it's a huge improvement over other existing achievement systems. My personal favorite thing is that every raid is 10-person and 25-person.

Chilton: And we want to improve that in *Cataclysm*. We feel there might be a little too much pressure; you have to do your 10- *and* your 25-man raiding to maximize your Emblem of Frost income.

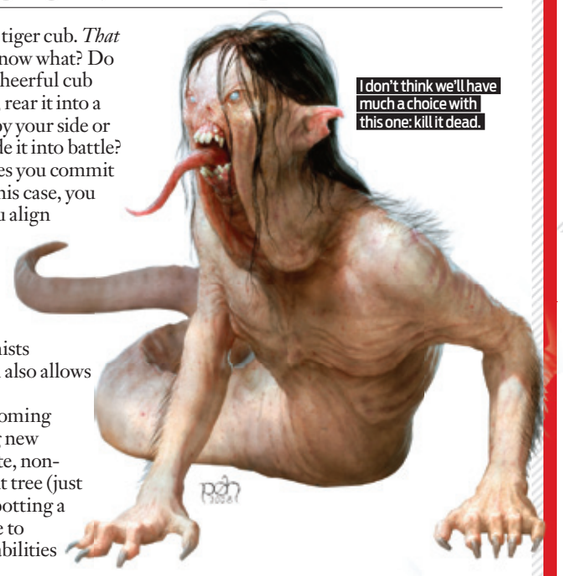
THE CREATORS GRADE *LICH KING*'S CHANGES

Visibility of endgame raid content	Oculus	Death Knights	Heirlooms	Neutral Capital Cities	Teleporting to Dungeons w/o traveling once
👍	👎	👍	👍	👎	👎

Choose Wisely

You can't have it all in *Rise of the Godslayer*, the upcoming *Age of Conan* expansion

OK, you bagged a tiger cub. *That* wasn't easy. But now what? Do you raise it as a cheerful cub that follows you around, rear it into a fearsome beast to fight by your side or toss a saddle on it and ride it into battle? *Rise of the Godslayer* makes you commit to a single path (and in this case, you only get the choice if you align yourself with the tiger-friendly faction when choosing from a few of the 10 available factions)—a restriction sure to drive completionists bonkers. The expansion also allows you to divert a percentage of your incoming experience to unlocking new abilities from an alternate, non-level-based advancement tree (just like *EverQuest*). But—spotting a trend here?—you'll have to choose a subset of your abilities to take into each battle.



I don't think we'll have much a choice with this one: kill it dead.

Castle Crashers

Ready the catapults, *Runes of Magic*'s *The Elder Kingdoms* introduces 300-player sieges

Siege combat is all the rage in MMOs right now, and *Runes of Magic* is dashing into the fray with its latest expansion that introduces massive guild castle vs. castle warfare (MGCVCW?!). Battles take place on a large map with the guild castles on each end; multiple focal points—NPC camps, energy resources for creating siege weapons and mobile, floating chunks of earth that can be ridden around on for surprise ambushes—keep your 150-person guild army on the move. Players use catapults, ballistae and battering rams to penetrate castle walls and tear down the buildings (and the related bonuses they give to the defending team) within. You don't steal guild resources from those you conquer, but you're rewarded with gold, titles and, most importantly, bragging rights.

Building your defensive structure out of wood seems like a poor choice—hope they didn't bring matches.

SO SAY WE ALL!

BROWSER EXCUSE ME, YOU GOT CYLONS IN MY MMO...

You knew someone had to make the once-hot sci-fi television series *Battlestar Galactica* into an MMO, but you might not have expected it to be browser-based. Don't worry, we're not talking about spreadsheets or cheesy flash animations—Bigpoint is developing *Battlestar Galactica Online* on the Unity platform (the same technology behind *Tiger Woods PGA Tour Online*), and it will consist of "a blend of tactical space combat, exploration and mission-based gameplay." Both humans and Cylons will be playable, so get your lie detectors ready.

FOR THE HONOR!

WOW BLIZZ IS BRINGING 'EM BACK TO THE BATTLEGROUNDS

For years, arenas have defined serious PvP play in *World of Warcraft*, but Blizzard is shifting the focus back to large team-vs-team, objective-based battleground fights in *Cataclysm*, and the most recent patch (3.3.3) took an important step in that direction. Honor from kills and completing objectives is doubled, and (hallelujah!) the Random Battleground tool has been added, which throws you into a random battleground and offers bonus rewards for kicking Alliance/Horde tail.

ALIEN SHIPS APPROACHING

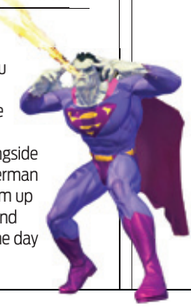
STAR TREK HELP IS ON THE WAY

Cryptic announced that at least one new playable faction would be arriving for *Star Trek Online* before the end of the year. Borg and Romulan are the top contenders right now, but Cardassians and Jem'Hadar are being considered as well; players will be given some say in the final decision. In the mean time, a death penalty and difficulty slider are on their way, in response to complaints that the game is too easy.

DASTARDLY DEEDS

VILLAINS CURSE YOU, SUPERMAN!

Hate freedom and justice? Inclined to mass destruction? *DC Universe Online* wants to support you in your villainous endeavors by allowing you to join the bad-guy side in the upcoming superhero MMO. Do-gooders will be able to fight alongside prominent heroes like Batman, Superman and Green Lantern, so expect to team up with the likes of Bizarro, Mr. Freeze and Vandal Savage if you want to ruin the day instead of save it.



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Kingsmouth Under Siege

Gruesome images corroborate disturbing eyewitness accounts

by Erik Belsaas

KINGSMOUTH, NEW HAMPSHIRE—Though police and journalists have recently lost contact with everyone who lives or has gone into Kingsmouth, New Hampshire, the *Fisherman's Fancy* has acquired disturbing images of events that are transpiring inside the town's perimeter.

The *Fancy* can confirm that the siege began shortly after a dark fog surrounded the town, which appears to have killed anybody who tried to escape. Astonishingly, reports of the walking dead and monstrous creatures attacking the living inside Kingsmouth appear to be true. Even more incredible, however, are reports of ordinary citizens stepping up to combat these forces of evil, and that some appear to be endowed with abilities not human in nature. In the only sign of hope in a bleak landscape of terror, the *Fancy* has confirmed that these citizens are working together to protect survivors barricaded in houses and churches, and fighting their way out of the town.

The last photograph taken within Kingsmouth city limits before all contact was lost.

It is important to note that these incidents are not isolated. Just yesterday, news reports were cropping up around the world of similarly supernatural occurrences, from vampires in London to werewolves in Seoul. Stranger still are the reports of factions with names such as Illuminati and Templars coalescing in these locations.

This is all we know for now. The *Fisherman's Fancy* will continue to reach out to its contacts within Kingsmouth to provide you with more details of the horror occurring there.

READ ME *Publisher/Developer: Funcom; Link: darkdaysarecoming.com; Release: TBD*

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DEV MAN TALKING

Daniel Kading is a Lead Designer at Relic Entertainment on *Dawn Of War II: Chaos Rising*.

Accessibility is a buzzword you hear a lot in game development. Sooner or later in your development career, you will be exposed to a producer/executive/money-man who wants to court a theoretical female/casual/Facebook market. Your lead designer/director/centurion should then translate this into accessibility— something is clearly keeping that demographic community from playing *real* games!

In fact, something is.

Hardware is the easy scapegoat. To convince a console owner that your game is worth buying, you have to show them that you've made something worth 60 bucks. For anybody else, you need to convince them it's worth $360—for the game and console—and you have to do it on a commercial during *Project Runway*.

But everyone has a PC! Banners ads are cheap! Companies who aren't making *Crysis* know that it's in their interest to develop for the widest range of hardware they can—including a dishwasher running Windows 98. And with digitial distribution, there's even less of a barrier to entry between consumers and products. Why, then, is there a growing gap between viable PC games such as *Modern Warfare 2: Olympic Medalist Edition* and *Farmville*?

Control freak

Consoles have proven that a simplistic, homogenized interface, created specifically for playing games, is ideal. Hence, controllers. Fine, dozens of PC-compatible controllers are out there, so what's the problem?

Trips to the store, basically.

Consoles also demonstrated that requiring a sold-separately peripheral dooms a game to failure. Most PCs don't come bundled with joysticks and other peripherals, so your game itself has to be the catalyst that gets players to drop that extra cash. That's difficult. Unless you're *Rock Band*.

So you have to develop for the input device that's bundled with your hardware. The Atari 2600's pack-in had five inputs. SNES, 12. The Xbox 360, a whopping 15 plus two analog sticks.

How many inputs are on a computer keyboard? Gamers that have a PC heritage are accustomed to its foibles. But put a newcomer in front of a first-person shooter and tell them to guess which button makes them turn left. Hint: It's not the "left" button.

Dear Genre...

So you're developing for a controller with five billion buttons and a mouse. In fairness, for certain genres, this is the ideal. FPSs work best with a mouse. Real-time strategy has never succeeded without one.

But those aren't newbie-friendly genres, especially RTS. Take that most basic endeavor of violent videogames—firing a gun: Pick two games featuring guns, one being an RTS. Regardless of what you're shooting at, how many commands does it take to shoot?

> **"Accessibility matters. Despite what our nostalgia tells us, complexity is not a virtue."**

In most genres, the answer will be one. In an RTS, three: one to select your unit, one to select the fire command and one to select the target. That upkeep of actions-per-minute isn't minor.

Dawn Of War 2's co-op surival mode The Last Stand, which we added to the game as free DLC in October, had players control a single, permanently-selected unit, eliminating that first click entirely. When released, our number of consecutive online users jumped up and stayed up. We'd snared a new audience by altering a PC-friendly genre and simplifying the controls.

The ubiquity of PCs provides a huge opportunity, but paying gamers are straying, with adulthood thieving away the time they used to memorize what subweapon ALT-semicolon is mapped to. Accessibility matters—despite what our nostalgia for strategy games like *Total Annhilation* or *Rise of Nations* tells us, complexity is not a virtue.

We can court players back if we develop games that fit the controls, rather than force the controls to fit the game, and if we manipulate or create new genres that celebrate the control scheme unique to PCs. Check out orisinal.com to see what can be done with a mouse alone. If that's not mainstream enough, try *Diablo*. ■

Implementing a cover system and eliminating base-building were two of the ways *Dawn of War II* made itself a more accessible real-time strategy game.

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IN SIMULATION

When not enticing strangers to play with his racing peripherals, **Andy Mahood** plays *iRacing.com*, *Rise of Flight*, *RACE On*, *DCS: Black Shark*, and *PT Boats: Knights of the Sea*.

"So, I hear you used to race cars?"

It was a common question-slash-statement, and one I'd developed a number of responses for over the years. Some flip. Some serious.

"That's right." I'd just switched from beer to white wine 20 minutes ago and hadn't yet built up enough liquid attitude to be rude or dismissive. "For a good chunk of my adult life, actually."

"What sort of cars?" He seemed genuinely interested, so it was probably just as well I hadn't shut him down with some flippant, alcohol-fuelled retort. That Irish liver came in handy at times.

"Mostly formula cars," I replied after a short pause. "Single-seat, open-wheel racers right up to Formula Atlantic."

"Cool." The eyebrow lift suggested he knew what those were. Perhaps I'd misjudged him. "I've always dreamed about driving one of those," he continued with a disillusioned expression. "But who's got that kind of money?"

The Pinot Grigio was tasting pretty good, so I decided to help him out. "You know, you can get a pretty authentic racing experience without spending a lot of money. What kind of computer do you have at home?" If he'd said "Mac" I would have been outta there.

"I just bought a new quad-core to play *BioShock 2*." Pride and confusion showed on his face. "Smokin' fast."

A PC gamer. Good. "Have you driven any of the newer racing simulations on the market?"

"What, like *Gran Turismo 5*?"

Why did everyone always make a left turn into console-land? "No. *PC* race sims. The kind you need a proper steering wheel and pedals for."

"I tried a *Need For Speed* demo last summer," he replied. "But the cars were too hard to drive with the keyboard."

I kept a poker face. Some people simply don't know any better. "If you want to feel what a real racing simulation drives like, follow me." My wife was going to kill me. Slipping away from a party to play a racing sim was as bad as sneaking away to watch a hockey game on TV.

Final Sale

Five minutes later, my wannabe-racer friend was sitting at my desk behind a hastily set-up racing cockpit: Fanatec Porsche 911 Turbo Racing Wheel with wirelessly connected pedal box and SimBin's *RACE On* loading on the PC. I adjusted the difficulty settings (primarily traction control and ABS brakes) and sent him out of the Monza pits in a nimble Formula BMW.

After I coached him through the initial learning curve, the metamorphosis didn't take long. "Holy crap!" he exclaimed after five laps in the lightweight 140-HP machine. "I could actually *feel* the car biting in the turns! That was amazing."

> **"If you want to feel what a real racing sim is like, follow me."**

"It gets better," I said, and promptly upgraded him to one of *RACE On's* new 250-HP Formula Master machines, followed by a Star Mazda open-wheeler from *iRacing's* hyper-authentic online racing service. Fifteen minutes and a handful of exploratory laps at Laguna Seca later, he was a convert.

"Where can I get one of these?" He was pointing excitedly at the Porsche wheel. "And this?" His hand waving hungrily at the on-screen *iRacing* replay. When I told him he could have a similar set-up at home, with software, for between $300 and $500, his reaction surprised me: He unexpectedly jumped up from the chair and bolted from the room. "I *gotta* tell my wife about this!"—the household comptroller, no doubt.

After shutting *iRacing* down, I followed him out at a more sedate pace and rejoined the party. My job here was done, and my wine glass was objectionably empty. ■

RACE On's new Formula Master class can test your advanced racing skills without the advanced six-figure expense.

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ALTERNATE LIVES

Desslock is *PC Gamer*'s resident cartographer, and he's been mapping out virtual worlds since *Ultima II: Revenge of the Enchantress*. He's bitter *Risen* didn't come with a cloth map.

Sweet @$! Poker is Lord British's latest masterpiece. That's the least rewarding fandom news since George Lucas announced that Boba Fett and Darth Vader would be cute little boys in the Star Wars prequels. Richard Garriott, the one-time crafter of the legendary *Ultima* series, has meandered into the mire of Facebook poker games. *THOU HAST LOST AN EIGHTH!*

Garriott's other recent adventures include officiating a wedding in outer space, spending a decade developing an MMORPG that survived for 484 days, and dispatching a killer whale to slay a stalker. Well, the giant cetacean executing his stalker *might* have been a serendipitous incident, but given the eccentric road Garriott has traveled since his *Ultima* days, it's sometimes hard to tell. In an interview with Kotaku [bit.ly/ccz5Uc], Garriott indicated he still intends to return to *Ultima*-esque games by making Facebook applications. Whatever, buddy. I'll be forever appreciative of Garriott's contributions to the RPG genre, but I'm more inclined to believe that he'll journey to the Earth's molten core than ever again produce anything meaningfully resembling the classic *Ultimas*.

Foiled Again

Each time there's some faintly promising *Ultima* news, such as when EA recently announced that a new *Ultima* was in the works, we're sucker-punched by reality (the one-time greatest RPG brand is being used for a city-building online strategy game). Seventeen years after the last decent *Ultima* game, it's finally time to recognize that the classic series may never recapture its former glory.

The *Ultimas* were legendary for their ambitious philosophizing and for introducing interactive worlds populated by NPCs who seemed to have their own virtual lives. Nobody has really offered a comparable package of features. RPGs such as *Dragon Age: Origins* and *NWN2: Mask of the Betrayer* have far surpassed the *Ultimas* in terms of offering morally nuanced, sophisticated storytelling, but their worlds are non-interactive and more linear, and their NPCs are stationary, loquacious kiosks. Bethesda's RPGs resemble the *Ultimas* more closely—they offer virtual worlds littered with interactive objects (literally, in *Fallout 3*'s case) and are inhabited by NPCs who possess their own motivations and daily schedules. But perhaps the most worthy *Ultima* successors are the RPGs developed by German developer Piranha Bytes, which recently released *Risen*.

Real Living

Risen has gotten a raw deal from the gaming press because it's technically a bit clunky and unforgiving to neophytes. Jumping looks spastic, and for the first several hours a solitary boar can easily smite you. But endure its foibles and you'll be rewarded by *Risen*'s amazing world. No other RPG features NPCs that act as alive or as threatening.

> "Someone has to carry on Lord Facebook's legacy."

Exploration is visually gratifying, incomparably rewarding and yet justifiably daunting. Threats and treasure aren't level-scaled, so trepidation and exhilaration are constant companions. From watching blacksmiths wander to work to seeing waves wash in on the beach, *Risen* feels like an *Ultima* game. Unlike so many RPGs, there's a raw sense of discovery and impression that you're interacting with a legitimate society.

But each successive *Ultima* game significantly improved its predecessor's features while *Risen* is basically the same game as the original *Gothic*, with improved graphics. NPCs are no more sophisticated, and there remain only a handful of interactive objects. Once you've met the NPCs and aligned with a faction, the rest of the adventure is considerably less interesting since the plot is bland and predictable. Piranha Bytes overreached with *Gothic 3*, which never completely worked as intended (although it's much improved by the latest fan patch, which you can grab here: bit.ly/b6NI1V), so it's not surprising the developers reined in their ambitions with *Risen*. But they need to evolve their game design mold like the *Ultima* games did. Someone has to carry on Lord Facebook's legacy. ■

The animations need polish, and clipping occurs regularly, but the NPCs and critters having daily schedules brings the world to life.

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SOAPBOX

Logan Decker is *PC Gamer*'s Editor-in-Chief. This column is the first in a series in which *PC Gamer* editors will provide easy solutions to all the world's problems.

Last month, *PC Gamer* took the extraordinary step of recommending against the purchase of an otherwise excellent game, solely on the basis of its obnoxious digital rights management (DRM). The victim was *Assassin's Creed 2*, and the perp was software that required the player to maintain a constant internet connection while playing—even though *AC2* has no multiplayer component. If your internet connection is lost for more than about 30 seconds, you're unceremoniously booted out of the game—your *legally purchased* game—until you reconnect. Ubisoft's mistake is repeated in this month's *Silent Hunter 5* and *The Settlers 7*, and it will be attached to next month's *Splinter Cell: Conviction* as well.

One of the problems with having to ask permission every time you want to play a game was made painfully clear a week after *AC2*'s launch: Black-hat hackery types launched a denial-of-service attack on Ubi's permission servers that kept many PC gamers from playing for hours. No, it wasn't Ubisoft's fault, but why should it needlessly permit hackers to prevent you from playing your game?

Our position isn't a philosophical thing about gamer's rights or anything like that. We simply believe that the DRM makes the game a bad deal at that price, more so than one-time online activations, or even Steam. What's got me scratching my little nerd-head is why Ubisoft—a forward-thinking publisher of high-quality games that's been responsive to customer complaints about DRM in the past—slapped this graceless, unpleasant kludge over its products. I guarantee you that it wasn't to prevent piracy. Ubisoft isn't stupid. It knows that pirates will deliver a crack faster than Domino's Pizza. Maybe it's creating the appearance of preventing piracy to investors who want to know that Ubisoft is doing *something* to keep thieving mitts off the products they sell.

> **"Here's my advice to Ubisoft: Steal your competitors' ideas."**

But it won't work. In fact, no matter what you do, nothing will deter internet cretins who get off on stealing games. But publishers and developers still can fight piracy effectively.

Take away the hay wagon, and thats how PC Gamers are feeling.

Let's look at who's doing it right. BioWare and EA gave us *Mass Effect 2*'s Cerberus Network, a pipe through which it can push DLC, patches, new weapons and even new missions—enough to justify another playthrough! That's a powerful incentive to buy a legitimate copy because it's a better product than the pirated version. Meanwhile, DICE and EA gave us *Battlefield: Bad Company 2*, allowing gamers to choose between a disc-check or up to 10 online activations. Now there's a thought: *EA figures out that PC gamers like choice!* This system probably cost jack to implement, yet the result was a satisfied hum from the audience—not rage, boycott threats and disbelief.

So here's my advice to Ubisoft: Put yourself on the other side of the five-finger discount for once—steal your competitors' ideas. We do: *PC Gamer* meets once a month with other magazine staff to share layouts and harvest the best ideas, like Little Sisters sucking up Adam. If you took either of the ideas above, if you outright stole them and copied them and then implemented them, you would't be punished. I promise. In fact, PC gamers, and likely the entire industry, will applaud you for it. ■

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The downside to putting your back to an explosion to try to look cool: getting your ass blown off.

ALPHA PROTOCOL

FULL PLAYTHROUGH Gaming's first spy movie

Today, my personal tale of international intrigue, disposable women, fleeing from my government and rogue superagentry has brought me to...the dirtiest gelato shop in Italy. It's a front, of course—I'm in Rome, and this ice cream hovel ("I think I just got salmonella by *looking* at this place," my operative mutters, walking in) is actually a high-security NSA data center.

Behind the counter, there's a stack of supercomputers with critical data that I need. I'm posing as a repair technician in order to get it. Behind the counter is a greasy man that I'm not sure I can trust. He's licking an ice cream scoop, a cigarette in the other hand. I can kill him. I can tell him the truth and hope he respects my cause. Or I can push my bluff, warning him that a volatile new internet virus is going to download horse porn all over his hard drives. Decisions are hard.

In situations like these, *Alpha Protocol* is playfully dramatic, where most RPGs would aim to be overepic. It's a spy game with *Mass Effect*'s combat and *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic*'s dialogue system, but freshened incredibly by its contemporary tone—so much so that it makes familiar RPG-action mechanics feel like a new genre.

That countdown is like having a multiple-choice test in front of you with a bomb stapled to every page.

Think fast

It achieves this with one minor tweak—a five-second time limit that's attached to your dialogue decisions. In most cases, you have a response that's either "suave," "aggressive" or "professional" to pick from, each anchored to one side of the radial dialogue menu. But even in nonlife-threatening situations, that countdown is like having a multiple-choice test in front of you that's full of questions you don't have answers for...and a bomb stapled to every page.

It's a game mechanic that reinforces the fiction of the game itself: spies and undercover agents are exactly the type of people that need to make snap decisions. When I begin the Taipei chapter of the game (one of three hubs in which missions take place), my operations handler, a foxy, pink-haired intel specialist named Mina, asks me what I think of the safehouse she set up. I can compliment the computer systems. I can sneer that the massive glass windows as a sniper threat. I can make a suggestive comment about the shower.

Having a timer attached to every

READ ME

PUBLISHER
Sega

DEVELOPER
Obsidian

LINK
alphaprotocol.com

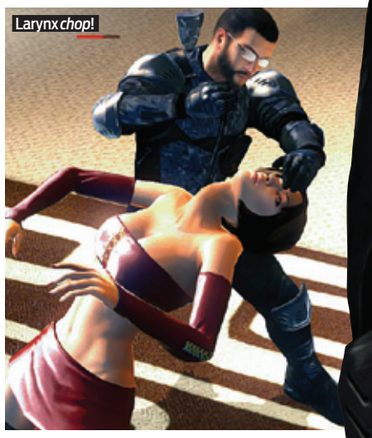
HOW REAL-WORLD SPIES WORK
bit.ly/c7NP0i

FOLLOW AP'S LEAD DESIGNER ON TWITTER
@chisavellone

Meet Sis: the mute bodyguard of a mysterious organization called G22.

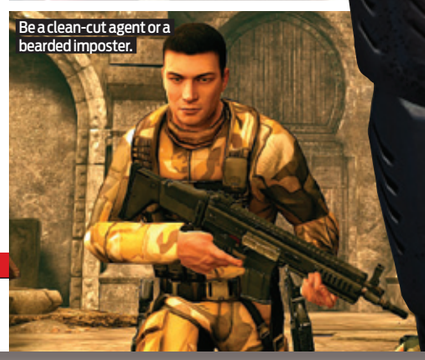
Choosing which weapons to specialize in is a delight. I rolled shotgun/pistol.

Drop enough skill points into your shotgun, and you'll unlock an ability that knocks down enemies with every shell.



Larynx *chop!*

"Hey babe, got2 overthrow Taiwan. Txt u l8r."



Be a clean-cut agent or a bearded imposter.

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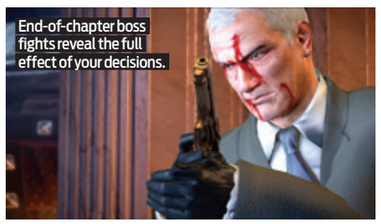
"Tell me what I want to know, or your liver is going to be Downy-fresh."

If you enjoyed the gunplay in *Mass Effect 2*, you'll be right at home in *Alpha Protocol*.

Loot varies from unique ammo to rare weapon modules.

Infiltration is fun! *Wheee!*



End-of-chapter boss fights reveal the full effect of your decisions.

"So you accidentally killed some CIA agents."

In Rome, you need to infiltrate a CIA base and place a bug to monitor their email. There are two ways to do this: with guns, and without guns.

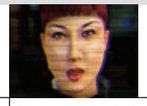
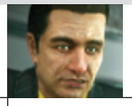
PRE-MISSION

Before the mission, you can purchase intelligence to help you.

- **Dossier information on the CIA** Purchasing this intel will expand your dossier on the United States' international intelligence agency.
- **Reduced infiltration difficulty** An insider will sell you information that will aid you in hacking and sabotaging CIA computers and electronics.

WE'RE WATCHING YOU

Alpha Protocol's characters have a stake in everything you do. With the CIA infiltration mission, your reputation with three factions will change based on what approach you take. Think of these three as the *American Idol*-like judges for a single mission—each with their own motivations that influence how they respond to your actions.

WHO	 **MINA** Your right-hand girl; *Alpha Protocol*'s ops and support.	 **LELAND** CEO of *Alpha Protocol*'s shady weapons manufacturer, Halbech.	**MARBURG** Military contractor; is planning a secret operation in Rome.
WHAT THEY CARE ABOUT	Your safety; avoiding unnecessary death.	The bottom-line of his corporation; fostering global instability.	Skill. Marburg sees you as a potential asset for his operation.
IF YOU USE STEALTH	Mina appreciates your ability to get the job done. *+1 reputation*	No change. How carefully you infiltrate the CIA doesn't influence Leland. *Neutral*	Taking a cloak-and-dagger approach will catch Marburg's eye. *+1 reputation*
IF YOU GO IN GUNS-BLAZING	Killing American agents isn't tolerated. *-1 reputation for every agent killed*	Stirring up a CIA listening post shows Leland you're capable of anything. *+1 reputation*	Setting off an alarm demonstrates to Marburg that you're a reckless agent. *-1 reputation*

WHAT IT MEANS

Your reputation with other characters is a driving element for how *Alpha Protocol*'s endgame plays out. Who you cater to and who you've betrayed ultimately determines who will support you and who you're able to side within the finale.

MISSION RESULT

By bugging the post, emails in and out of the CIA base will be forwarded to your safehouse computer. These messages supply information on other people you come across and expand your dossiers over time. You can leverage some data for professional or personal reasons.

conversation you're having simply keeps you honest—you can't "game" the dialog system to engineer the game's plot. What it encourages, instead, is developing a personality for your character that you're comfortable with. The developer emphasizes that there aren't any explicitly "bad" choices you can make in *Alpha Protocol*, even to the extent that lowering your reputation with your morally conscious handler (see "So you accidentally killed some CIA agents") won't inhibit you from completing the game. You can play like an malicious, arrogant Sean Connery if you'd like, make absolutely no one like you and produce a unique ending.

Tough call

This climaxes in a few key moments—in one mission, I sat at the end of a religious scholar's compound with a sniper rifle, using a high-tech camera scope to perform facial scans of the people that were gathered there for a party. It's a tense moment when I find my target—in less than a dozen seconds, Mina, the voice in my ear, is running data and combing INTERPOL reports to make sure we've even got the right guy while my finger hovers over the trigger. He's definitely a terrorist and a weapons smuggler—but he may not be responsible for the attack on the civilian airliner I'm investigating. Sparing his life might help me find the real culprit.

Having the time it takes me to unwrap a Snickers bar to decide if a man lives or dies is an absolute thrill.

The more you're put in situations that demand quick, impulsive responses, the more you feel like you have to live with your decisions. In that way, it's the unapologetic pace of *Alpha Protocol*'s story that delights—having the time it takes me to unwrap a Snickers bar to decide if a man lives or dies is an absolute thrill.

B-Movie bad guys

Alpha Protocol's script and storytelling are sharp, modern, sarcastic and drama-dense. But to be blunt like Jack Bauer: in combat, you fight one enemy throughout the entire game. Excluding bosses, each stage of the game features the same moderately-armed, patrolling guards, although they're reskinned to look like Russian gangsters, CIA g-men, or ex-military mercs, depending on the locale. They're faceless, voiceless enemies that feel like they were cast from the nearest Steven Seagal movie Obsidian had on the shelf. They're entertaining to fight against—a buckshot blast from my shotgun (upgraded with an extended magazine, muzzle choke and lightened stock) sends a bad guy crumbling to the ground in a ragdoll heap—but there's no incentive to apply different tactics once you've met them.

A minor saving grace of combat is the suite of character abilities awarded to players that use stealth: activating "silent running" lets me sprint across a room without being heard; a reflex ability called "evasion" turns me invisible for three seconds if I've been spotted. A toolbox of gadgets—including EMP grenades, radio scramblers and taser traps—make room for tactics other than running and gunning.

Watered-down action or not, I'm thrilled someone is making *Alpha Protocol*. The fiction is too compelling to ignore; a Bond movie with a few tedious action sequences is still a Bond movie, and this is the closest thing to a spy-movie experience I've ever seen in a videogame. ■

Evan Lahti

Release JUNE 2010

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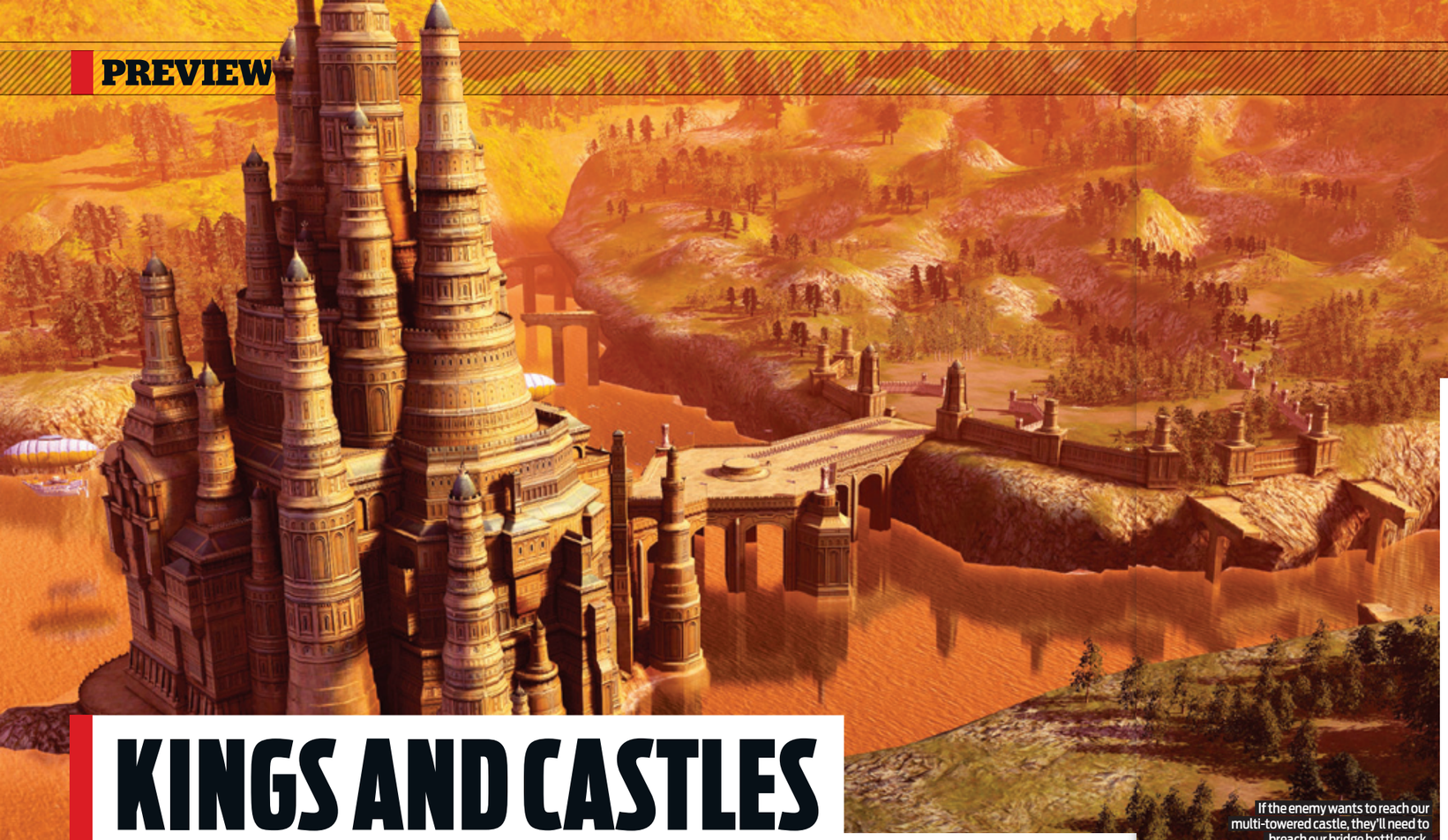

If the enemy wants to reach our multi-towered castle, they'll need to breach our bridge bottleneck. We hope they don't have blimps.

It takes hundreds of soldiers to storm the gates of a ginormous castle.

These soldiers can relax for the moment—dragons haven't been added to the game yet.

KINGS AND CASTLES

FIRST LOOK The creators of *Supreme Commander* go medieval

When Gas Powered Games boss Chris Taylor envisions a fantasy world, he pictures vast armies of hundreds of noble knights, archers and wizards clashing with equal numbers of evil, mythology-inspired warriors on a huge battlefield, sieging mighty castles and bravely charging into combat with enormous fire-breathing dragons…which then squash them flat.

And the best perk of running your own development studio is that you get to turn your visions into games; in Gas Powered's next real-time strategy game, *Kings and Castles*, he's setting out to create exactly that. *PC Gamer* got a rare, extremely early first-look at the game in its formative months.

"What we want to bring to the fantasy RTS space is the ability to have the large and the small interacting," Taylor states up front. "Whether you're talking about *Age of Empires I*, *II* or *III*, *Warcraft*, the *Lord of the Rings* games—they just weren't able to have giant units on the map because there was no way they could render them and make them fit on screen." But using the zooming technology developed for *Supreme Commander*'s giant robot battles uniquely positions GPG to bring the giants of the fantasy realm onto the real-time strategy battlefield.

"Dragons weren't really possible to the degree that we can do them now." *–Chris Taylor*

"Dragons are something that weren't possible to the degree that we can do them now," says Taylor. "We can have a real, giant, believable, fantastic creature that can be really intimidating and awesome." He's clearly excited about the possibilities, adding, "And if you're evil, your dragon will literally get bigger and stronger as it feeds on enemy soldiers."

Taylor promises other "legendary" units will take the game's "wow factor" up a notch as they plow through armies of soldiers and cavalry. He cites a huge stone monument you can build to your king that, with enough magical power, can come to life and join the battle, and a spectacularly disgusting "Meat Giant" erected from the remains of a battlefield full of fallen soldiers and horses. "The goal is to push to areas that are really quite fantastic," he says.

He makes no secret of this game's shared heritage with *Supreme Commander 2*, and though it will inherit more than a few gameplay mechanics—he cites *SupCom* in medieval times as "the foundation of the idea"—Taylor says he is designing *Kings & Castles* with the goal of carrying on a medieval RTS spirit he feels has been lost since his favorite Ensemble Studios RTS, 1999's *Age of Empires II: Age of Kings*.

"*Kings and Castles* is a dyed-in-the-wool RTS game for people who love the RTS experience," Taylor promises. As opposed to the similarly themed *King Arthur: The Role-Playing Wargame*, *K&C* has all of the base building and resource management of a traditional RTS, although with some interesting options, like slow-cutting forests for a steady trickle of resources that won't expose you to new avenues of attack (like in *Warcraft*), and temporarily shutting down an enemy's economy by marauding through his farms to drive off workers.

The single-player campaign (which will be cooperatively playable by up to *eight players*) will tell a classic good-versus-evil story of noble humans battling an evil army of mythological creatures. There's a third faction in the mix, but Taylor will only say one thing for certain: "No elves."

These early screens and concepts, combined with Taylor's enthusiastic descriptions, have given *Kings and Castles* a very promising start. We'll be checking in with Taylor and GPG regularly to watch this fantasy become gaming reality. ■

Dan Stapleton

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bit.ly/90ckM

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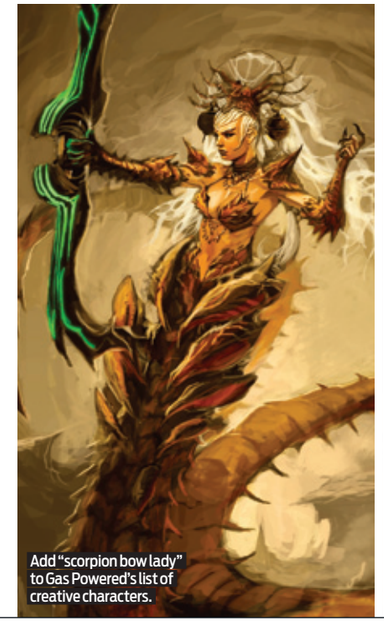
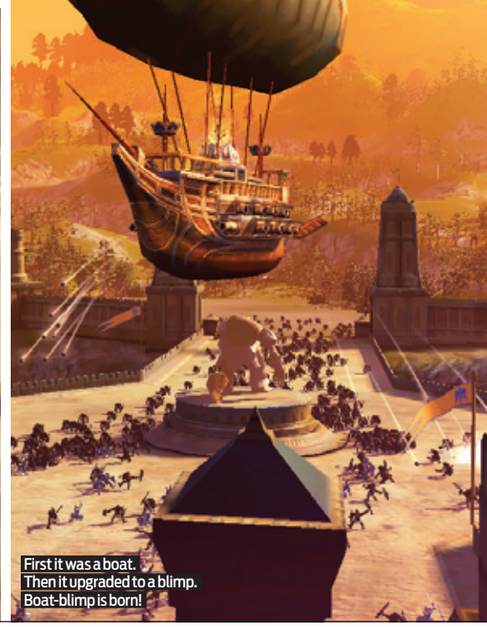
@deathbot9

Release 2011



Add "scorpion bow lady" to Gas Powered's list of creative characters.



First it was a boat. Then it upgraded to a blimp. Boat-blimp is born!

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EA estimates that it'll have more than 50 cars ready to drive at launch, including models from Lamborghini, Porsche and Lotus.

NEED FOR SPEED WORLD ONLINE

PLAYED IT Fast, furious, free

EA's plan to make money? Make gasoline DLC.

Porsche cost in game: free. Porsche cost in reality: $147,000.

Here's a *PC Gamer* secret: When a developer calls us on our Important Red Telephone to invite us to see a free-to-play game, we have a prepared bag of excuses to tell them why we're not interested. "Yeah... we're covering Mac games now. Did you hear Steam is on the Mac? We thought we'd get on that." Or: "We have deep astrological concerns. We're more comfortable writing about your side-scrolling 2D Hello Kitty beat-'em-up MMO thing when Virgo is in lunar ascension."

These are lies. But damn tradition—a free-to-play car game? What took you so long, racing genre? You're the most sensible fit for this crazy, overused business model. Cars have parts, parts that you can earn and buy with microtransaction moola. Races don't take long—booting up the game for a few laps between TV shows is the kind of functional niche free-to-play should fulfill.

The fact that *Need For Speed World Online* (doesn't *World Online* sound a little redundant?) is sleek and passable as a modern racer feels like a bonus. The decade-plus veterans of EA's racing studio have done great work to make *NFSWO* easily controlled with W, A, S and D. They've integrated 15 playful (but not arcadey) powerups like Traffic Magnet into the game—when deployed, AI drivers gravitate hazardously toward the first-place player's car.

The franchise's heritage of cop-chase gameplay is upheld: it'll debut with single-player pursuit missions where you can play as police or run from police; EA plans to add it as a multiplayer mode later on. You'll always be able to play with your friends (even if they're driving a V12 Ferrari against your Nissan), but automated matchmaking will determine which car tier your opponents are driving, on as well as the skill of the driver.

Ultimately, our biggest question about *NFSWO* can't be answered until it's up-and-drifting: Will we need to pay for upgrades to have a chance in hell at winning a race? This problem affected EA's other recent free-for-all, *Battlefield Heroes*. After some sneaky post-release tweaks, earning unlocks and XP that would let them compete with paying players became an uphill struggle for non-paying players. As long as the same fate doesn't befall our cars, tracing laps on *NFSWO*'s 157 miles of roads could fit nicely into online gaming. ■

Evan Lahti

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needforspeed.com/web/nfs/world/

Release SUMMER

www.WorldMags.net & www.aDowns.net

MYTHEON

HANDS-ON A shuffling of elements from strategy, MMOs and card games

What does a Greek sorcerer look like? Does he chug potions filled with olive oil and ride a chariot? Does he name himself Harry Potteropoulos? Nope. Mine summons spiders. And skeleton bowmen.

As I sit down at Petroglyph Studios to touch their new MMO/action RPG, *Mytheon*, I load up a level-one Warcaster—a summoner that can conjure minions (like oversized spiders and bone archers) that control like RTS units. The other two character classes are the direct-damage specialist Elementalist and a support class called an Eidolon.

I'm starting the game with an unusual amount of gear for an RPG—my inventory is filled with a "starter deck" of 40 power stones. Think of the stones as playing cards, like those in *Magic: The Gathering*. When played, a stone activates an ability, then vanishes into a "discard pile" until the deck is reshuffled.

I hop into the first instanced area, a swamp inhabited by the Greek monster

I summon a minotaur king to grapple with Hades' toenails.

Echidna, and the game randomly draws five stones from my inventory and places them in my "hand." My Warcaster summons three spear-wielding Amazon warriors to fight giant spiders and swamp golems; each time I use a stone, it's replaced a few seconds later by a new one, randomly drawn from my deck. The more creatures I create, the more the gameplay shifts from a *Diablo*-esque hack-and-slash to something closer to an RTS.

Next, I'm joining Petroglyph in a co-op mission against Hades with a higher-leveled sorcerer. Hades is a towering, powerful enemy, but four of us together manage to topple him using some of *Mytheon*'s epic-tier power stones—I summon a minotaur king to grapple with Hades' toenails while my Elementalist ally hands out massive lightning storms and earthquakes like sidewalk hot dogs.

Since *Mytheon* will be free to download and play, Petroglyph will rely on *Mytheon*'s microtransactions to put food on the table. Item buyers can expect to get some enticing perks for their money, such as accessories that level up with your character, new skins for armor and weapons or potions that affect all members of your party.

Peeking at the world map revealed 20 different locations based on Greek legend to fight my way through—from the Halls of Olympus to the Depths of Tartarus—all inhabited by creatures and gods like Poseidon and Zeus himself. Petroglyph says that the game will be heavily supported after launch, with plans to add new zones, PvP and content based on the mythology of other civilizations. Interested? *Mytheon* is in open beta right now. ■ ***Erik Belsaas***

READ ME
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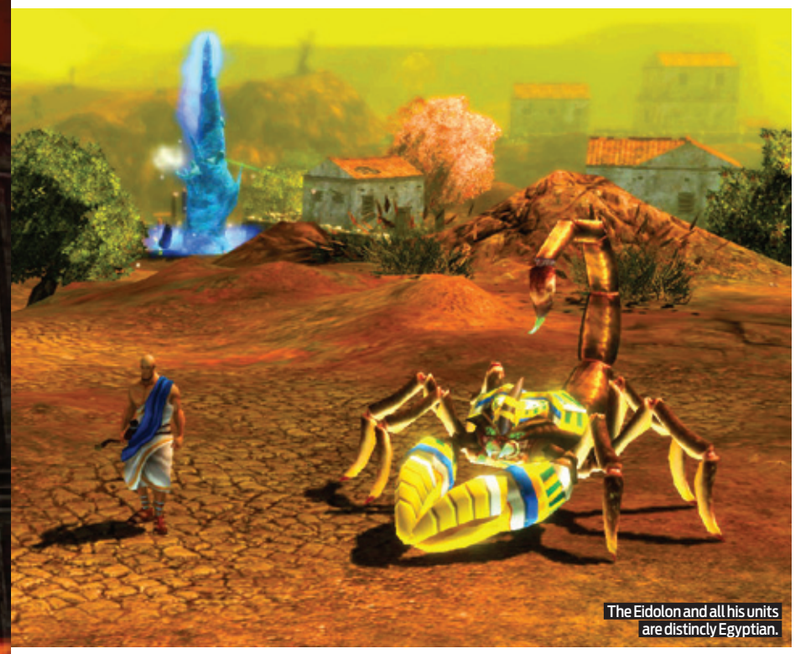
The Eidolon and all his units are distinctly Egyptian.

Always avoid the creepy swamp.

"Great King Tritan, I have come for your mermaid daughter and your attractive pegasus."

Myth Maybes

Mytheon's makers say we'll see mythical creatures from non-Greek civilizations in future expansions. Who will it be? Here are some possibilities.

Civilization	Their Mythology	Embarrasing Culture	*Mytheon* Minions
EGYPTIAN	Cat appreciation, Osiris, Anubis	Slavery, elaborate funerals	Mummies, spitting camels
NORSE	Bearded gods, big hammers, Asgard	Winged hats	Valkyries, potheads
AMERICAN	Wooden-toothed presidents, Pochahontas	Hannah Montana	Davy Crockett, Paul Bunyan
KLINGON	Gods that created Klingons are killed by their creations (because they're badass)	Klingon opera	Bat'leth-wielding warriors

Release SPRING-SUMMER 2010

www.WorldMags.net & www.aDowns.net

Imagine a tower-defense game played on a gridded race track. Now imagine it crashed by a round of croquet played by giants. That's *Boulder*.

BOULDER

EXCLUSIVE REVEAL Medieval skeeball or 'Monty Python's Tower Defense'

Incredible, bizarre things come from Chile. It's a nation with volcanoes *and* glaciers. Easter Island is there. Pork empanadas are there. And our favorite independent game of 2009— *Zeno Clash*—was made there.

We loved it so much that we couldn't wait for an official announcement to bring you the first news of what ACE Team is working on next. We've tracked down the first details on its next project: a tower defense-like game tentatively called *Boulder*.

Our world-first screenshot of *Boulder* shows its basic parts: 2D marching minions, a sloping track that leads to a castle door, towers and a big stone to hurl at them.

The concept, though ACE Team emphasizes that it's subject to change, begins with the hilly track. All the action takes place on this line of grass, like a linear mini-golf course with a defensive wall at either end. To destroy this barrier (and defend your own), you'll field a strange army of ballistae, trebuchets, catapults and war elephants with towers for backpacks.

In motion, it looks like a chess match that's been interrupted by lawn croquet-meets-*Super Monkey Ball*—played by giants. The end objective is to put enough dents in your enemy's gate with the boulder so that your army of cardboard pawns can flood the opponent's castle.

"Players will constantly be switching between 'offensive' and 'defensive' modes," says ACE Team lead designer Andres Bordeu. "During the offensive portions, they will control the boulder until they fall off the path or ram the castle gate at the bottom of the hill. Each time the boulder rams the gate, it then will reappear at the top of the mountain/hill."

Mowing down your enemy's tiny cardboard soldiers with your boulder or felling towers will earn currency, which you use to buy more units and towers. And if you save up, you may be able to deploy the Bull of Heaven, one of the game's epic upgrades that ACE Team revealed to us. In the ancient poem that inspired it, "The Epic of Gilgamesh," this animal was history's first bull in a china shop. We imagine it will level a similar effect on your opponent's towers in the field.

Boulder wouldn't be an ACE Team game if it didn't look like it was designed while under the influence of a peyote binge and a full replaying of everything ever produced by David Bowie. The game's collage of classic art styles, seen directly in the 2D cardboard soldiers that mill about the field, are partly inspired by the work of director Terry Gilliam, says Bordeu.

"What Gilliam did was take very 'serious' fine art and present it in a ridiculous way. We decided very early that we wanted this to be a funny game—the concept is a bit nonsensical. So, we will poke some fun at epic war games and also at traditional art." ■

Evan Lahti

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COOL FACTS ABOUT ROCKS
bit.ly/crbcOR

Release TBA

www.WorldMags.net & www.aDowns.net

It was at that moment that Johnny regretted buying a Toyota.

MAFIA II

PLAYED IT Climbing the ranks of organized crime in Empire City

The original *Mafia* took the open city and third-person action of a game like *Grand Theft Auto III* and used it as a backdrop for a tightly scripted, linear mob epic. It won a passionate following, but a lot of players struggled with the abscence of a truly open world and with the often achingly slow cars. Eight years later, *Mafia II* is doing the same thing again, only now in a time period with hot rods and muscle cars, and in an even more beautiful location. Empire City is vast, fully open and inspired by the grand old sprawls of New York crossed with *PC Gamer*'s hometown of San Francisco.

Still, the story remains the focus. This time you play Vito Scaletta, returning from World War II and ascending the ranks of organized crime with your best friend Joe. But where the original *Mafia* never satisfyingly combined its setting and linear story, 2K Czech is keen to create an authentic post-war urban atmosphere.

The designers arranged it so if you're on a specific street at a specific time for one of the missions, then the animations around you will all be unique. Old women will walk, hunched in the cold, carrying grocery bags home to their apartments, and drunks will stumble around outside liquor stores. The attention to detail is sublime.

I roll around town, getting pointlessly drunk, picking fights with strangers, buying pink suits...

The scripted sequences do borrow *Grand Theft Auto*'s sense of pace, polish and dialogue delivery. That isn't a bad thing. In our demo, we drive to a rival gang's bar to cause some trouble, taking revenge after they destroyed a truck full of our merchandise. Our colleagues roll up, armed to the teeth with Tommy guns and Molotovs. The bar is empty, but we riddle it with bullets, smashing windows and sending wood chips flying, and then move on to a foundry construction site, the homebase for the rival gang. Despite orders to keep it low key, there's a long shootout in which we use the cover system to move between broken cars and eventually wipe the gang out. It's a bit of a slog—duck, wait, pop-up, shoot and repeat frequently.

Mafia II's designers emphasize the natural way these events escalate. Your experiences should follow naturally from one to the other, producer Alex Cox explains, progressing with the plot and escalating in danger and excitement in ways that make sense. They want to maintain the integrity of the story, and that's certainly the experience the mission we've just seen provides.

But I only half-hear this advice because I've shot a man in the face through his front windshield and stolen his bus. I'm too busy driving up steps and along pedestrian bridges, sending people jumping over the sides to their doom, to be fully attentive to what Cox is saying.

Driving out of the park, I spot a gas station, point my bus toward the pumps and smash straight into them. There's an enormous explosion. I step unharmed from the wreckage and head toward the gas station's front door. I click to open it, and...wait. There's an alternate action possible. I close the door again and, this time *kick* the door open. I never open a door with my hands again. The clerk inside is unalarmed by my kicking in his door or exploding his livelihood, so I buy a soda and start punching some guy.

I roll around town for the next 20 minutes, getting pointlessly drunk, picking fights with strangers, buying pink suits, killing police officers and performing ludicrous stunts by driving off ramps with eight different cars. ■

Graham Smith

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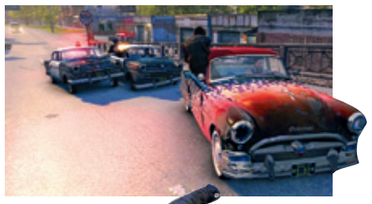
Release AUGUST

No era in American history is safe from the Hawaiian shirt.

"Whuddaya mean, 'No breakfast menu after 1 p.m.?' Get 'em, boys!"



Release Meter

After a weeklong excursion deep into the spleen of the jungle, we came upon a giant stone head. Suddenly the statue jumped to life, commanding: "I am Olmec, granter of dreams and consolation prizes. I will grant you fabulous fortune, or release dates for the next few months. The choices are yours, and yours alone." I chose you, reader.

Q2 2010	
Alpha Protocol	Sega
EVE Online: Tyrannis	CCP
GTA IV: The Ballad of Gay Tony	Rockstar
GTA IV: The Lost and the Damned	Rockstar
Greed Corp	Valcon Games
Lead and Gold: Gangs of the Wild West	Paradox
LEGO Harry Potter: Years 1-4	Warner Bros.
Rise of Prussia	Paradox
R.U.S.E.	Ubisoft
Sam & Max: The Devil's Playhouse Episode 2, Episode 3	Telltale Games
Split/Second	Disney
Splinter Cell: Conviction	Ubisoft
Victoria II	Paradox

Q3/Q4 2010	
APB	EA
ArmA 2: Operation Arrowhead	IDEA Games
Battlestar Galactica Online	Bigpoint
Crysis 2	EA
Dead Rising 2	Capcom
DeathSpank	Hothead
Deus Ex: Human Revolution	Square-Enix
Elemental: War of Magic	Stardock
Fallout: New Vegas	Bethesda
Lionheart: King's Crusade	Paradox
Mafia II	2K
Magicka	Paradox
Medal of Honor	EA
Need For Speed World Online	EA
Portal 2	Valve
Rage	Betheda Softworks
Red Orchestra: Heroes of Stalingrad	TBD
Sam & Max: The Devil's Playhouse Episode 4, Episode 5	Telltale Games
Sid Meier's Civilization V	2K
StarCraft II: Wings of Liberty	Blizzard
Subversion	Introversion
World of Tanks	Wargaming.net
World of Warcraft: Cataclysm	Blizzard

2011: FUTURELAND	
American McGee's Alice II	EA
Diablo III	Blizzard
Guild Wars 2	NCSoft
Mass Effect 3	EA
MechWarrior	(TBD)
Star Wars: The Old Republic	EA

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THE FINAL PUSH

The return of **STARCRAFT II**, the most popular PC strategy game in the world, is almost upon us ***By Rich McCormick***

RELEASE SUMMER

Some of you will be lucky enough to play the *StarCraft II* beta. Many more of you will not. A good portion of those forced to go without will be howling, denied early access to the eagerly awaited sequel to the world's most popular PC strategy game. To both these groups of people (the haves, and the have-nots), Blizzard has some news: The multiplayer beta that people are playing—it's definitely not *StarCraft II*.

"People are using the beta as a demo," says Chris Sigaty, *SC2*'s lead producer, "and that was never really our intention. It was specifically to test our new hardware infrastructure, as well as the balance of the game at the various skill levels."

Integrated with a revamped Battle.net client, which arranges 1-on-1 and 2-on-2 matches between players of comparable skill, this prerelease version is tightly focused. Games against the computer are only available at the incompetent "very easy" difficulty level to allow players to experiment with tech trees and build orders while the AI dribbles and blunders into walls.

Sigaty is *very* keen to assure me that these features are but one facet of the perfectly cut diamond *StarCraft II* will eventually become. "We're trying to direct players, to say, 'Hey, go try out the single-player thing, look at our challenges, check out the map editor, go play cooperatively with friends against the AI or, indeed, go play this competitive multiplayer.'"

So, good news all around. The lucky few who Zerg-rushed their way into beta access have but scratched the surface; those who were passed over can look forward to a more balanced game that no one has truly played yet.

What will that game be like? Let's crack open the carapace of *StarCraft II*, and see what we can find in the gooey mess within.

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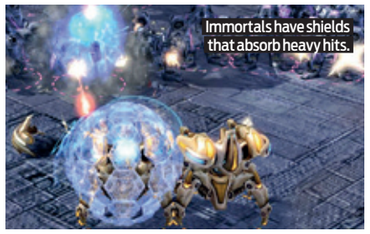
Shh, we're sneaking.

A base without air defense is a dead base.

The fruits of researching Void Rays.


Immortals have shields that absorb heavy hits.

Protoss buildings are sleek and glowy.

Designed to both please legions of existing fans and appeal to a new generation of gamers, *StarCraft II* is described by Blizzard as a "new game for old players." Its single-player campaigns will be released as a series of three packs, the first of which—*Wings of Liberty*—will focus on the Terran story. The campaign for the insectoid Zerg—*The Heart of the Swarm*—will follow roughly 18 months later. The third race—the space-elf Protoss—will get a set of missions to call their own at an unspecified time after that.

The first *StarCraft* was so stupidly fun as a competitive multiplayer game that it's been co-opted as a heavily televised national sport in Korea. Is there a danger that these single-player campaigns could prove nothing more than glorified tutorials, a stepping-stone to the multiplayer?

It's a worry Sigaty has heard before. "Some people are under the impression that single-player is the training ground for multiplayer, and we actually don't view it that way. We're taking single-player in very different directions this time—each mission is its own minigame in many instances."

We've seen examples to back this up. In one, a small band of Terran workers is desperate to get offworld before they become

Fortunately, badass Terran space-hero Jim Raynor is in the vicinity. (That's you.)

soft, fleshy Zerg-munchies. The problem: they're in the south, the spaceport is in the north, and between the two is a road infested with hungry Zerg.

Who's bad?

Fortunately, badass Terran space-hero Jim Raynor is in the vicinity. (That's you.) Facing off against increasingly bitey waves of the swarm, you must provide safe passage for the evacuation convoys.

Some of the forces provided are unique to the single-player campaign. The Firebat—a pressure-suited flame-chucking assault trooper from the first game—has been excised from multiplayer due to balancing issues, in favor of the similarly beefy Marauder. But in the single-player campaign balance isn't an issue, so the fan-favorite Firebat resurfaces, ready to pump napalm from his dual flamethrowers.

Sigaty tells us that's just the beginning. "We've got a bunch of other things in single-player, like tech purchase and research, and a detailed story mode."

It's this story that breaks most with RTS tradition, offering a spaceship-set hub—Raynor's battleship Hyperion—where players will roam between operations. It's the home of Raynor's Raiders, the freedom-fighting mercenary group you'll lead as noted badass Raynor. The vessel offers conversation aplenty with other Raiders, upgrades and, most interestingly, the chance to accept or decline missions. Take on worthy operations from characters such as humanitarian doctor Ariel Hanson, for example, and your Raynor will align himself with good. If you just want to get stuff done and steal alien artifacts for your own swag pile, you'll want to listen to that amoral marine Tychus Findlay.

Edu-tainment

Between the twin pillars of single-player and multiplayer lies a new entity: a set of tests that Blizzard dubs Challenge Mode. Sigaty explains: "They're missions that go into very specific ways of playing. Things like rushing, using spellcasters effectively, unit countering."

Challenge Mode acts as the *real* bridge between the other two styles of play, and

Where's Tom Cruise when you need him?

will explain and then test a player on the advanced concepts used by the pros. (Here's hoping for one that teaches you how you're expected to click 150 times per minute without a mouse-finger like a bicep.)

According to Sigaty, Challenge Mode is like being back in school, albeit a school where you're given control of murderous bugs and asked to run up to heavily armed teachers and eat them before the bell rings for lunch. This intensive schooling will, Blizzard hopes, prevent people from feeling put off by their first steps into the whirling, dizzying online experience, as potential players have been in previous games.

"Challenges attempt to teach some of those things other players pick up by stomaching a number of losses. We try our best to help people not go in there not knowing anything and then have bad losses a few times in a row and say 'this isn't for me.'"

What to do with all of these finely honed counter-rushes and warping-sneak attacks once you've drilled them into your head and your index finger? There's only one place left to go: the toe-to-toe, pause-and-you'll-die, oh-god-the-panic multiplayer.

"It's a stressful but fun experience," says Sigaty. "I compare it to playing an FPS. We were getting games where you have

KOREA-DEFINING How *StarCraft* became a national obsession

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Motherships cloak any friendlies they hover over.

landslide victories, and now we're at a point where you're either effective or could've been effective if you'd just realized a few things."

Sigaty maintains the beta is nothing yet but a balancing act to test the resilience of the newly revamped Battle.net system, and the game's race vs bigger race vs race-with-more-legs asymmetry. Standing underneath the lopsided pile, propping it up with quicker reload times or unit prices is Blizzard. Keenly aware that one slip, one mildly overpowered unit, could bring the whole house of hardcore multiplayer crumbling down amid cries of "OMG OP!!!" the team is churning out patches to tweak core aspects of the game and the little dudes you control.

The biggest change in beta balance so far has been to the Terrans. "They were buffed up fairly intensely, and we're continuing to look at that. We're still seeing some people feel like they're still not there yet," says Sigaty.

Patch notes reflect this concern, reducing the time of infantry upgrades—vital to defend against early rush gambits—by a significant 30 seconds. Bringing long-range weaponry to bear earlier levels the playing field significantly.

These tweaks work both ways. I asked Sigaty about his approach to overpowered strategies, and that *StarCraft* staple, the rush. "People will figure out rushes, and we need to make sure they're not too abusive, but we don't want to shut down the rush as a key part of the game. Another example: we're seeing a lot of use of [Protoss] warping right now. We're coming up with ways to make it part of the Protoss arsenal but not make it overpowered." Shortly after our interview, a beta patch sapped the shield strength Zealots—the base Protoss melee units—from 60 to 50. It's the little things.

Net gain

The ease with which the very best *StarCraft* players can slip into *SC2*'s multiplayer is evident from the dominance of familiar names in the upper echelons of the beta ladders, but the steps taken to allow the participation of those who would stare blankly at a Baneling with no idea how to use it are impressive.

The revamp to Battle.net, which integrates online multiplayer tightly into *StarCraft II*, is a core reason for some lengthy delays, but Blizzard belives it'll be well worth waiting for. For the first time, it's offering a wide-open window to new players, one previously held shut by the twin arms of ignorance and fear of the hardcore. Sigaty reckons this will help pull new players into to competitive play: "Battle.net was a place you *went to*, and it had this perception, I think, that it was a hardcore place, and you only went there if you were really into the game. But now the online experience is integrated, you're always online, your friends are always there, so it's not a scary thing."

The lessons of will be reinforced through video tutorials and match replays that you can view through Battle.net, Sigaty says. "Our intention with *SC2* is to save replays up to the network and let people download and watch them, paying attention to the pro and platinum leagues and what players do so they can learn."

Battle.net's ubiquity extends beyond hosting games and replays. Its robust friends and matchmaking systems is to be complemented by support for modders tinkering with the code. Blizzard understands the importance of modders and mapmakers in extending their games beyond their typical lifespan. "Our hope is that there's going to be entirely new styles of games coming out of *StarCraft II*. *Warcraft III*'s tower defense maps were a phenomenon, and we want people creating things like that," says Sigaty.

With time pressing before the game needs to be rubber-stamped and shipped, Sigaty outlines how his team is trying to squeeze in as much useful content for those with the knowledge and inclination to fiddle with the base game. "We're trying to also include examples of things that people can look to as roadmaps for games they can make, things like tower defense maps or (another *Warcraft III* hero-on-hero RTS) *Defense of the Ancients* maps."

The desired result will be these industrious types uploading maps, tweaks or even entire game modes to Battle.net, and letting others download them and add to the game's legacy.

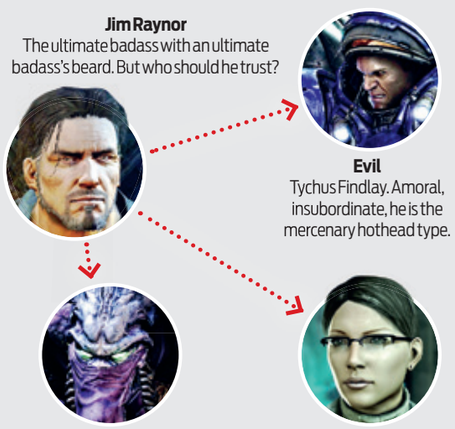
"We've seen some amazing stuff without a centralized download location, so we think sky's the limit once we're able to bring in something like that online."

Sigaty takes community seriously—when I quizzed him he was up to speed on all recent strategies, namechecking tactics like the Planetary Fortress rush (fly your moveable Terran fortress outside an enemy's base, set it down, build massive cannon on it, win) and speculating on areas the community might expand into next.

"We're totally paying attention. We have community teams in every region and we're reading through our forums constantly." By the time you read this, Blizzard will have implemented a feature suggested loudly by beta testers: the ability to refocus the camera on a specific spot of the map you're interested in, and call it up with a keystroke. You don't get this kind of player/developer interaction from many other game makers.

At the time of this writing, *StarCraft II* sits tantalizingly close to release-worthy perfection—in fact, most developers would have shoved it out the door long ago and tuned balancing based on the feedback of paying customers. It's this meticulous attention to detail and quality that make Blizzard's games so anticipated—and so difficult to wait for. ■

ADVICE CITY Who will you listen to?



Jim Raynor
The ultimate badass with an ultimate badass's beard. But who should he trust?

Evil
Tychus Findlay. Amoral, insubordinate, he is the mercenary hothead type.

Meh
Zeratul. Protoss Dark Templar. What is his game? What is his aim? What's he got on his chin?

Good
Ariel Hanson. She's got the morals of a doctor and the glasses of Sarah Palin.

Your harvests are your lifeline.

The Zergling rush: as classic as it is lethal.

Command Centers with the Planetary Fortress upgrade can be used offensively.

"The online experience is integrated now, you're always online." *–Chris Sigatay*

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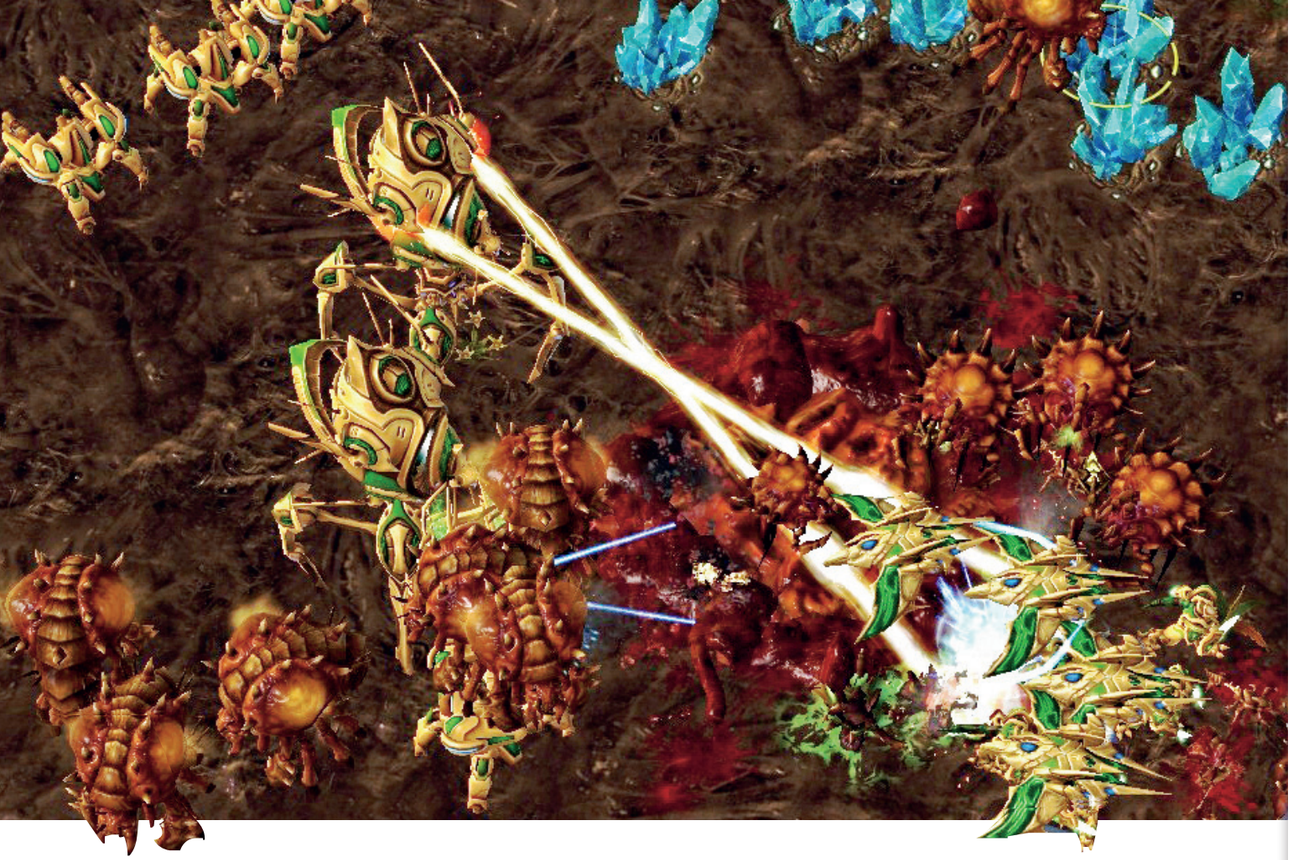


14 WAYS TO WIN AT STARCRAFT II

Can't tell a Zerg Larva from a Protoss Zealot? We'll guide you from **STARCRAFT II** newbie to master ***by Rich McCormick and Quintin Smith***

So you've got access to the *StarCraft II* beta, but you suck. The Zerg swarm your base within seconds. Your economy never grows fast enough for you to build more than a few Marines. If you do manage to survive longer than five minutes, you discover your enemy has three bases while you're still stuck at home. Battle.net has become the school playground all over again, right down to the kids who call you names which are *definitely not your real name*.

Don't feel bad, chum. It's not your fault. *StarCraft II* is hard in ways other real-time strategy games aren't. Where expanding your base in *Supreme Commander 2* is a useful tactic, only in *StarCraft*'s multiplayer crucible is it *essential*. And while almost any strategy game can be won with a quick rush, only *StarCraft*'s ghastly Zerg are famous for it.

In fact, only *StarCraft players* ever become famous for their ridiculous strategy gaming skills, because it requires a level of skill other games don't dare ask of their players. The sequel is still being nurtured through the beta stage by Blizzard, but its principles are already in place, and they're pretty much the same. Enter an online match of *StarCraft II* without attack plans, counters and build orders already in mind, and you will be almost instantly ruined.

So it's time to get good. It won't happen overnight, or even just by playing it on your own. You're going to have to read about it, think about it, make lists and hone your mind and reflexes untill you're a sleek, focused, *StarCraft II* mouse-clicking machine. All you need is a guide to help you get there. This guide. In the following pages we explore the principles of *StarCraft II*, guide you through the strengths and weaknesses of its units and give you the strategies you need to get good, fast. Happy hunting. ■

BEGINNER

1 BUILD ECONOMY

Everything you build in *StarCraft II* requires crystals or Vespene gas. Begin by having at least two SCVs, Drones or Probes on each crystal. As you grow, build Vespene refinaries and have at least three gatherers on each.

2 RESOURCE GROWTH

Your economy is never finished. Keep building more gatherers constantly, and once you've got your Vespene refinaries, expand to new resource patches. One tip for Terrans: build spare Command Centers within your existing base, fill them with SCVs and fly them over to new resources for an instant new base.

3 SPEND THRIFT

Spend resources the moment you get them and never queue units up. It's tempting to queue and make things easier on yourself, but you want all of your money going to work on creating or upgrading things *right here and right now*. If you ever have more than 200 crystal or gas, spend it. If you ever have more than 600 crystal or gas, you're embarrassing yourself.

4 ZERG RUSH

StarCraft's signature attack is simple to orchestrate. Immediately build a Spawning Pool to turn your Hatchery's Larva into Zerglings. Once that's up, spam the nasty critters until you've got a gaggle ready and attack ASAP!

5 STOP ZERG RUSHES

On the receiving end of a Zerg rush early on? If you're Terran, block the ramps up to your starting point with Supply Depots and throw out a Barracks focused on churning out Marines. They can hide behind the buildings and shoot the Zerglings. If you're Protoss, a few Zealots can take down a rushing Zergling force—just make sure to build a Gateway..

6 WATCH REPLAYS

Every match you play is automatically recorded, right down to how your opponent moved his camera. When you're beaten, watch the replay, see the mistakes you made and where your foe went right. Copy them next time—it might not work, but it'll make you better.

MEET THE PRO!

Shaun "Apollo" Clark is a member of the professional e-sports operation Team Dignitas and an all-round *StarCraft* guru. We traveled deep within his carbon-steel training bunker for intensive training.

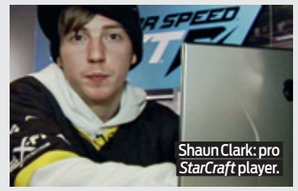
What made you choose *StarCraft* as your game?
StarCraft: Brood War has the largest fanbase and professional scene in the world...I spent two months over the summer of 2009 experiencing the life and culture of being a gamer in South Korea, and it was an absolute paradise. With the release of *StarCraft II*, gamers from multiple tiers will be given a fresh start to try and succeed.

On average, how many hours do you practice every day?
Ever since the release of the *StarCraft II* beta, I've been playing an average of 12 hours a day during the week and eight on the weekends, thanks to support from my family and the superb sponsors of Dignitas.

What effect do *SC2*'s new units and features have on the gameplay?
This is an extremely sensitive area because the beta's only been out for three weeks, but currently, if I could break *StarCraft II* down, it's 70 percent *StarCraft* with a 30 percent *Warcraft III* influence. I feel that the game is faster than *StarCraft*, and there seem to be a lot more things to keep control of, such as correct timing of the Terran MULE, Protoss Chrono Boost and the Zerg Queen, while building and controlling an army with a mixed unit composition, which then has multiple abilities needed to edge the advantage in your favor. On the other hand, I feel that the micro that differentiates players seen in *StarCraft* isn't quite up there yet in *StarCraft II*, but I believe this is because of how young the beta still is.

Is there anything you'd have changed if you were making *StarCraft II*?
Being a Terran player, the biggest thing I miss from *StarCraft* is the Vulture, a fast, dynamic unit that was extremely fun to play with. Apart from that, I love *StarCraft II*.

Help us out: How *do* you counter a turtling Protoss teching straight for carriers and motherships?
He's going to require a lot of Vespene gas; therefore, he'll need to expand. You can deny him from expanding, cutting off his resources, but I would personally time an attack, compare unit counts and if I feel that I have an advantage going in, try and bust open his front door.



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INTERMEDIATE

7 ALWAYS SCOUT

It warns you of incoming attacks, and lets you check enemy research and pick the moment to launch your own strike. When a match starts, send a gatherer to scout to their base.

8 GROUP TROOPS

Your troops are idiots. Grouped together, they'll wander aimlessly and fire irregularly. Use command groups (Ctrl + a number key) to keep the same units together—put ranged troops on the back-line and melee specialists up front. Then focus their fire by manually picking individual targets in order to kill enemies double-quick.

9 MICROMANAGE FIGHTS

All races have "spellcasters" that come preloaded with sets of superuseful battlefield abilities, but they won't use them automatically. Tab through your men in battles, chucking out powers as they become available and useful, and your other units will reap the rewards with buffs and murderous powers.

10 PLAN YOUR BUILD

Working out what to build on the fly gets you killed—aimless research wastes invaluable resources. Set up a few standard builds to deal with typical enemy forces: for example, a Terran Marine force is out in minutes after building five SCVs, two Supply Depots and a Barracks with a Reactor. This predefined plan takes the strain off your brain.

ADVANCED

11 MEMORIZE HOTKEYS

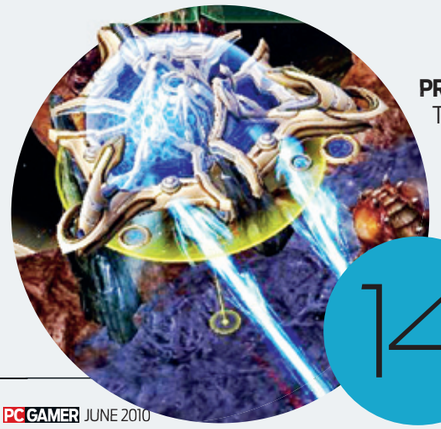
In *StarCraft*, the mouse is your attack finger, pointing at foes and shouting "kill!," but it's the keyboard that's in charge of vital maintenance. Learn important hotkeys—S for the Terran SCV, for example—and practice until you can build a force without needless, second-wasting mouse clicking.

12 TRY THE INFESTOR

It spawns Infested Terrans, controls enemies with Neural Parasites and spews Fungal Growth, but doing any of this draws all the fire in the world. The Infestor is a fat, expensive slug with no direct attack, but it's range of uses have thus far proved more micro than most players can handle. The trick is shielding them with troops and personally firing off their abilities.

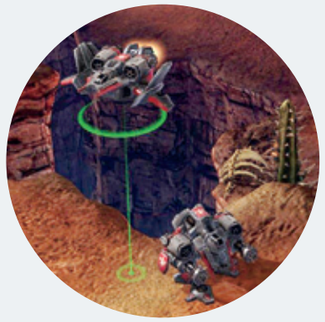
13 MASTER THE VIKING

A terrible ground-to-ground mech that can turn into a terrible air-to-air jet. It takes several seconds to change from one form to the other, so make sure you know what you're charging into before you attack.



14 PROTOSS MOTHERSHIP

Too many players fling these at the enemy like frisbees, when the truth is, they're support units to be coddled and protected. Use the Cloaking Field and Vortex abilities to hide friendly forces while locking down enemy defenses, and the Mass Recall power to draw reinforcements into the fight (or your assault force back out).



STARCRAFT II'S UNITS EXPLAINED The fighty dudes of each faction, and how to beat them

TERRAN

MARINE
√ Massed Marines are a cheap, potent force against ground and air units alike.
x Enemy Zerglings and Zealots will slice through your Marines in an instant.

MARAUDER
√ Huge armor, uses grenades to slow down enemy units.
x Slow and support-focused, vulnerable to melee attacks. Splits open if surrounded by melee units, like Zerglings.

REAPER
√ Jetpacks and det-packs make these perfect early-game base raiders.
x Low health and only a pair of weak pistols; Siege Tank or Stalker will shred them.

GHOST
√ Cloaking snipers. Ideal for picking off Templars or calling down nukes.
x Made of weak Terran flesh. If they're spotted they won't last long at all.

HELLION
√ Flame-thrower is an ideal Zergling killer or tool for expansion-base raids.
x Short range and minimal armor means anything with a gun can outshoot them.

SIEGE TANK
√ Research turns it into a powerful stationary turret for offense or defense.
x Surprisingly flimsy. The Protoss Immortal or a group of Zerglings will crack it.

THOR
√ A giant mech that handles antiair and antiarmor duties.
x Infantry is its weakness; its armor is easily overwhelmed by low-cost units.

VIKING
√ It's main fighter form is good against carriers. As a ground mech, it kills Zealots. A deadly resource raider.
x Lightly armored when in the air or on the ground.

MEDIVAC
√ Transports units and then heals them in combat with magic space rays.
x Anything pointing up will knock a Medivac out of the sky. Keep an eye on the micro.

BANSHEE
√ Packs lethal air-to-ground missiles, ideal at putting down Roach or Zealot rushes.
x No antiair weaponry, weakish armor. Air-to-air units will swat them.

RAVEN
√ Manage it effectively and you can chuck down turrets to pin your foe in place.
x No air-to-air defense. A single turret is no match for a set of Phoenixes or Mutalisks.

BATTLE-CRUISER
√ Bristling cannons. Good for any assault.
x It's slow, and the longer the Protoss Void Ray is on it, the more damage it takes.

ZERG

QUEEN
√ Best used to seed extra Larva to speed unit production.
x A small force can take down a Queen, and she has a long build time.

ZERGLING
√ You get two per Larva; Create a cheap, fast-moving swarm in a hurry.
x No armor. The Hellion burns Zerglings like horrible insectoid-baby kindling.

BANELING
√ Bursts explosively on impact, killing all Marines and Zealots dead.
x Ultraflimsy. The Protoss Stalker and Immortal are ideal counters.

HYDRALISK
√ The Zerg's main ranged unit and only mobile surface-to-air fighter.
x Zealots and Zerglings can get in close, negating the Hydralisk's long-range spines.

OVERSEER
√ A floaty balloon used to spot enemy units, even if they're cloaked or burrowed.
x A big floating sack of goo, it's not the strongest unit in the face of antiair defenses.

ROACH
√ Tough as nails, can move and heal rapidly while burrowed.
x Marauder grenades slow rushing Roaches, making them target practice.

MUTALISK
√ A nasty air-to-air and air-to-ground pest, great for resource raids.
x Weak armor, not great at air-to-air. They're also expensive, so you'll need lots of Vespene.

CORRUPTOR
√ Can drop an unhealthy, restrictive funk on enemy buildings and shoot down Vikings and Phoenixes.
x They have no response to attacks from below.

INFESTOR
√ Can lob gooey sacks that dispense infected Zerg/Marine hybrids and slow enemy movement.
x No direct attack. It's easily squished by anything.

PROTOSS

ZEALOT
√ Tougher than Marine and Zerglings. Deadly up close. Can be upgraded to charge and close distance quick.
x No ranged or antiair attacks, expensive to build.

STALKER
√ Their rush is something to be feared, their lasers turning Reapers into ash piles, and can upgrade to teleport.
x Zerglings take the lasers out of the equation.

SENTRY
√ Floaty orb that casts protective shields and forcefields to support allies.
x Weak in direct combat. A band of Zerglings is enough to take the Sentry down.

IMMORTAL
√ Guns on legs, great for countering enemy heavy infantry like the Roach, or armor like the Siege Tank.
x Expensive, can be swarmed by Marines or Zerglings.

DARK TEMPLAR
√ "Hey, are you infantry of any kind? If so, I will absolutely murder you with my giant scythe!"
x When they can see through his stealth, he's just a Zealot.

HIGH TEMPLAR
√ An aggressive psychic badass, laughs at anything ranged.
x Ghosts will pick him off from a distance, and at close-range, stabby units hurt.

ARCHON
√ A glowy psionic with lightning hands, makes short work of Zealots and Mutalisks.
x Can still be swatted by the other races' big guns.

COLOSSUS
√ A laser-faced walker, disintegrates legions of low-level units in microseconds.
x Powerful in attack, but flimsy when faced with enemy Thors or Ultralisks.

PHOENIX
√ Specialized air-to-air killer.
x Battle-cruisers, Carriers and anything surface-to-air are too strong for the nimble fighter's light shielding. Keep it back until needed.

VOID RAY
√ It's powerful laser does more damage the longer it stays on a single target.
x It can't kill small units quickly, so beware of swarms of anything that can shoot up.

CARRIER
√ Stocking launchable, laser-wielding interceptors, it's a threat against most targets.
x Concentrated antiair flak from Vikings, Void Rays and Corruptors will bring the huge hull crashing down, wasting a large expense of gas.

MOTHERSHIP
√ The UFO of Death. Cloaks nearby friendlies and murders nearby foes.
x Again, antiairplanes like the Viking and Phoenix are ideally placed to pierce the Mothership's shields. You'll need more than one, though.

ULTRALISK
√ Can wade into an enemy base and kill everything.
x Marauders will slow the beast's advance with grenades, letting other units concentrate fire on its shell.

BROOD LORD
√ Lobs icky Broodlings at its ground-based target. Dug-in Siege Tanks suffer hugely from such an assault.
x With no antiair weaponry, an inviting target for Vikings.

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WAR AND PEACE

Inside, it's life-and-death confrontations, cutthroat competition, conspiracies, betrayals and white-collar crime across the span of a hostile universe. But outside the virtual world, developers and gamers work together to shape the future of ***EVE Online***. *PC Gamer* goes to Reykjavik, Iceland for a behind-the-scenes look at the Council of Stellar Management at work—and play.

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EVE players Greg Russo (left) and John Zastrow (right) get to know Lead Technical Producer Torfi Olafsson (middle) over drinks.

The architecture near CCP is a pleasant mix of old and new.

Another restaurant conquered in the name of *EVE Online*.

The CSM represents this entire galaxy.

"I'll give you 10,000 ISK for that french fry. Final offer."

CCP's cafeteria produces all manner of tasty treats.

Stargates allow players to jump between solar systems.

While PC Gamer*'s policy is to avoid printing words inappropriate for a magazine published for all ages, we've decided to make an exception for this story, and leave in the strong language that characterized many of the exchanges we observed while covering the Council of Stellar Management. —Editor*

"Well, at least I remember to pay my bills on time..." Ward hides his widening grin by taking a sip of wine. A series of good-natured *ooooh*'s ripple out across the table and conversations cease as everybody pauses to see how the two men sitting on either side of me are going to respond. We're eating a fancy meal at a classy Italian restaurant in downtown Reykjavík, and two *EVE Online* players just got called out for mismanaging internet spaceships. That kind of chatter is unusual enough to hear over a plate of prosciutto, but they weren't merely being called out by some random joe on the forums—this particular ribbing was delivered by Noah Ward, *EVE*'s lead game designer.

For most gamers, sitting down to dinner with the developers of their favorite game lies firmly in impossible-dream territory, but for the nine *EVE* players sitting with me at the table, it's very real—and over the past two years, these meetings have become an essential component of the game itself.

Every six months, elections are held in *EVE Online* to elect nine players to the Council of Stellar Management (CSM). And in an appropriate parallel to the kind of tactics players deploy every day in *EVE Online*, these seats are won through rigorous campaigning and corporate politics. The elected player representatives then work with the rest of *EVE*'s 330,000 players to develop a list of issues to be discussed when developer CCP flies them to its headquarters in Reykjavík, Iceland to sit down with them face-to-face twice per year.

After four months of talking with constituents, poring over forum posts and debating the relative merits of one issue over another, the Council members have finally arrived in Iceland to meet with the developers at CCP. And it's obvious they're loving every second of it.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS Council members define their expectations for the winter CSM

"I've spent more than 80 hours on meetings and writing and rewriting proposals already. I want to get a better understanding of how CCP and the development process works—and how I can influence that in order to make *EVE* a better game."
—Tim Heusschen

"The CSM needs to demonstrate some tangible results in order to motivate players to participate, campaign and vote."
—Jason Renouf

"This summit is happening after the new expansion, and we're coming in with chips on our shoulders saying, 'Your expansion's fucking awful for these reasons.' We came here with rage...We're here trying to push forth an agenda, because if nothing else, we are among the biggest nerds who play this game. Clearly, we want the game to be better."
—John Zastrow

The first day: Worlds collide

If you haven't been playing *EVE Online*, you've been missing out on some of the most astonishing developments and emergent gameplay moments of the past decade. *EVE* is a futuristic sci-fi MMO that revolves around player-made corporations battling for economic, political, and planetary control of the galaxy, and also revolves around one simple principle: if you want to do it, you can. This lawless, profit-driven Rapture-in-space has seen mercenaries spend months and months on planning in order to infiltrate a corporation and tear it down from within, launched more than a few careers in human slave trafficking and developed an economy so dynamic that CCP hired a real-life economist to manage it.

But the economist works at the macro level and doesn't intervene in cases like that of Goonfleet, which had been one of the largest corporations within *EVE Online* until its leader forgot to make routine fund transfers before leaving on a real-life vacation. As a result, just weeks before the summit, Goonfleet lost most of the facilities and planets it controlled due to an inability to pay the maintenance fees. When the leader returned to a group on the verge of mutiny, he looted what little assets Goonfleet had left, fired everyone from the corporation and fled to another part of the galaxy.

So Ward's friendly wisecrack had to have stung a bit for at least a few players at the table. In fact, after a betrayal like that, I expected Asher Dratel and John Zastrow, the two members of Goonfleet on the CSM , to be seething with bitterness and anger. But they hardly seemed phased by the loss, and were eager to rebuild their alliance under a new banner. They laughed with everyone else at West's prodding and happily told their side of the story.

This might strike most people as a little weird, especially considering that many other MMOs shenanigans like these could result in real-world litigation. But every *EVE* player is comfortable with this dichotomy. On the one hand, *EVE* is dark and dangerous: nobody can be trusted, everyone has their price and a swift, merciless death awaits you around every corner if you're not careful. But on the other hand, players are optimistic, cooperative, entrepreneurial and often downright brilliant in the ways that they find to bend the game world to their ideas and purposes.

EVE's society is always on the verge of

WHOOPS! THERE GOES THE SPACE STATION!

The defining moments in *EVE Online*'s history

June 2003
One month after launch, player pirates overrun trade routes by camping travel points. CCP creates Black Ops armies to defend the routes, but releases a memo from the NPCs that sums up the *EVE* universe: "We can no longer guarantee the safety of our citizens. All efforts to restore order have failed."

April 2005
After months of patiently infiltrating every level of a corporation they were hired to destroy, Guiding Hand Social Club operatives jumped ship, stealing everything not tied down and blowing up the rest. The target corporation loses 30 million ISK (*EVE*'s currency) in assets, bankrupting it instantly.

Summer 2006
In the largest bank heist in *EVE* history, one banker makes off with 790 million ISK (estimated to be worth $100,000 at the time) that he convinced investors to put into his virtual bank, before proceeding to spread rumors of his real-life death to throw vengeance-seeking investors off his trail.

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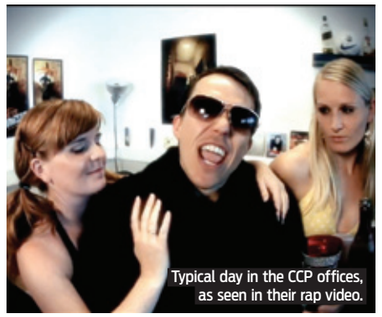
Discussion topics ranged from Covert Ops frigates to football.

Sabotage: *EVE*'s form of free market competition.

Office building mullet: professional up front, party in the back.

CCP's offices are located right on the harbor.


Typical day in the CCP offices, as seen in their rap video.

I still have no idea why this happened.

Two CCP'ers having fun between sessions.

EVE's ships are often outlandish and always deadly.

Don't let the beauty fool you; *EVE*'s galaxy is a harsh place.

John Zastrow's lawyerly instincts often showed in the discussions.

DRUNK DEVELOPING

CCP has fun in some very unique ways.

The Drunken Joyride

It began with one CCP employee deciding that, instead of golfing, he'd rather just hop on a golf cart and deliver booze to his colleagues. It ended with—I'm told—at least four people hanging off the sides of the golf cart with wine bottles in their hands until they crashed into a fence.

Pulling a Michael Richards

To be fair, CCP Researcher Pétur J. Óskarsson insists that he didn't mean for his response to be racist, but when asked the riddle, "What do white people and elephants have in common?" on stage in front of the 2009 *EVE* Fanfest audience, there has to be a better answer than, "They are both superior."

Open Mic Night for Griefers

CCP invited Darius Johnson, the Goonfleet leader, to be a part of an official panel during last year's Fanfest. He showed up half an hour late, completely drunk and dressed in a leather aviator's costume. His NSFW speech included explaining how he avoids *EVE*'s language filters and that the Goonfleet's goal was "not to destroy *the* game, it's to destroy *your* game...Nothing makes me happier than blowing your shit up."

anarchy; most alliances function in the sectors of space where there are no ruling government bodies or police force to restrict players' actions. Sometimes it's messy. Sometimes things go wrong. But there's very little centralized authoritarian control applied in most MMOs that establish what can or can't be done. In *EVE*, players collaborate with developers. Just like they're doing now, around the dinner table, as everybody exchanges their favorite stories from a digital world still just a few years old. Stories that seem to emphasize that *EVE Online* is breaking out of its original mold and becoming whatever players want it to be.

Stories about CCP itself—not all of them flattering—were passed around the table just as merrily. I had flown into Iceland knowing little more than that you didn't want to do your banking there, but by the end of the CSM, one thing was very clear: If Reykjavík was a college party town, then CCP would be the biggest frat house on campus. Yes, it's a very serious developer of fine games, but just look at the facts: the majority of employees are young males; breakfast, lunch and sometimes dinner are served in the company's cafeteria by two grandmotherly Icelandic women; free snacks, sodas and energy drinks can be found in every kitchen; and "I was drunk" is the only excuse needed for showing up late in the morning.

And that's not even taking into account the sheer number of "this one time when I was drunk" stories that everyone at CCP seemed to have on hand. The raucous, booze-fueled mayhem even extends to official CCP events (see "Drunk Developing"), and this spirit—both laid-back and slightly crazed—contributes to CCP's innovative development structures that incorporate player feedback with unprecedented efficiency. Where Blizzard is the buttoned-down suit assuring players, "Don't worry, we've got everything under control" (and they do), CCP is the hung-over rock star smashing guitars, trashing hotel rooms, using excessive amounts of pyrotechnics and crowd surfing at every opportunity.

The second day: Spaceships are serious business

If someone had asked me to predict what the first topic debated by the CSM would be, I certainly wouldn't have guessed an hour-long discussion of political philosophy. But I probably should have. The 13 people in this room—nine elected players, three CCP developers, and one moderator with experience working for the European Union—are breaking new ground in game development. The CSM functions as a representative democracy, and they're in charge of making sure the system gives voters adequate input without letting them overrun the entire development system—no easy task. John Zastrow, the only returning CSM member, jokingly referred to himself as "the George Washington of this CSM," and he may not be too far off. If their plans are successful, years from now game developers could be looking back at the members of this year's council as the Founding Fathers of a development structure that, for the first time in history, incorporated player feedback in a deep, meaningful way.

But the meeting certainly wasn't spent entirely on lofty beard-scratching philosophy—it was still about a videogame, after all. This meeting, and all the meetings throughout the week, for that matter, were marked by the odd juxtaposition that exists in *EVE*: it's a very serious, business-driven game that's riddled with outrageous memes and the nothing-is-sacred irreverence of the internet. CSM members introduced themselves to CCP employees by saying, "Hi, I'm a space councilor!" in silly voices, and pictures of Kitlers (cats that look like Hitler) were brought up on projectors alongside flowchart diagrams that broke down the game's development process.

The third day: Rocking the boat

As anticipated, the players weren't shy about telling the developers what they thought needed fixing. The fist-pounding, shouting and occasionally messy exchanges between members would've fit right in on a reality TV show. One particularly bitter CSM member started his address to Sveinn J. Kjarval, the head of the Game Master group, with "I don't hate you, but..." and proceeded to explain why he pretty much did hate him. It was a cathartic experience for the players; Zastrow told me, "Being able to look a game designer in the eye and pound your fist on the table to express your displeasure is something you just can't do trolling forums. I can see the expression on their face change when I tell them what I think and see that it's having an impact."

Considering the anger directed their way at times, as well as the occasional angry

FOUNDING FATHERS

It didn't quite make sense to me how Pétur J. Óskarsson, the Researcher at CCP who manages the CSM, and Dr. Eyjólfur Guðmundsson, CCP's on-staff economist, could easily trust a game they care enough about to refer to it as "our baby" in the hands of players that are entirely inexperienced with game design. When I posed the question to them, Óskarsson told me, "*EVE* is our baby, and these players are a part of that baby." Guðmundsson chimed in, "Like any good parents we always do what we think is best, and these talks with the CSM help us figure that out." While I was naturally suspicious of the players, they (and everyone else I talked to at CCP) believe in player empowerment so much that it never even crossed their mind to *not* trust their players.

Óskarsson's own credentials are in the form of a 21-page paper that established the impetus behind, the justification for and the implementation of the Council of Stellar Management. The report went so far as to analyze the theory of the evolution of societies and how *EVE* went through each step, citing the works of philosophers and social theorists, including Karl Marx, Immanuel Kant, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Thomas Hobbes.

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Soda, energy drinks and cofee kept both sides fueled through the long meetings.

Compensating for something?

A rare quiet moment near the CCP offices in Reykjavik.

Modern Viking boats: more shining, less floating.

Game Masters listened patiently to CSM feedback.

The moderator was essential in keeping the discussion focused.

Onward and upward to a bigger and better *EVE!*

accusation from a CSM member that someone else's opinions, statistics or responses were "bullshit," I was impressed with the completely unshakeable composure CCP employees constantly maintained. At times, even *I* was ready to leap over the table and take one or two CSM members by their collars and let them know that they were acting like jerks, but the developers (represented in each session by department heads and rank-and-file employees across a wide swath of departments, including Programming, Design and Community Development) always maintained an imperturbable stoicism, like Greek heroes holding their ground against a lethal hydra of nerd rage. It's not easy to stand there and take a verbal lashing from your harshest critics, but instead of banning dissenters from the forum and retreating to their development cave to pretend that the naysayers don't exist like some developers (you know who you are), CCP flew some of the most vocal critics to Iceland to let them scream in their faces so they could understand their concerns, and every player there respected them for it.

The occasional emotional brush fire notwithstanding, the atmosphere of the meetings, now past the halfway mark, was overwhelmingly positive—two groups with different perspectives coming together to understand why the other side felt the way they did, and trying to figure out how they could synthesize both perspectives into a concrete policy or game mechanic that would improve *EVE*. CSM rep Tim Heusschen told me that he was particularly impressed with how seriously CCP took the CSM meetings; his favorite moment was seeing two developers grab pens to write down a suggestion he made. In fact, the developers took away a lot of good ideas, including one that a dev told the Council "is so good on so many levels that it arouses me somewhat."

HOW IT WORKS

Step-by-step breakdown of the process agreed on for the CSM to request developer resources.

1. CSM members talk with other players and among themselves to develop a list of 10 issues they want the CCP development team to address.
2. The CSM sends the list to Pétur J. Óskarsson, who presents it to the development team.
3. The development team estimates how many development hours each of the projects would take and sends it back to the CSM through Óskarsson.
4. Taking into account the time required for each of the changes, the CSM arranges the issues into a prioritized list and returns it to Óskarsson.
5. Óskarsson presents the final list to the developers and makes sure that they are considered and included in the development process. Óskarsson reports back to the CSM as progress occurs.

The fourth day: Money where the mouth is

But the most arousing experience for the players had to be when CCP agreed to give the CSM tangible power within the company. On the last day, the devs announced that after the earlier discussions about improving the CSM's ability to affect change, the CSM was being raised to the status of its own department within CCP. This is revolutionary; in one swift move, the CSM went from what could be considered a glorified focus group to what CCP considers to be a "stakeholder" in the company, given equal consideration with *every other department* in requesting development time for a project. That means the CSM—and the entire playerbase it represents—has as much influence on development projects as Marketing, Accounting, Publicity and all the other teams outside of the development team.

This is, of course, the stated intention. But has any developer gone to such lengths for its fans? I've spent a week observing CCP, taking inventory of concerns and complaints from even the most aggravating of griefers among its players; there seems to be little question that CCP genuinely believes in the importance of the players' feedback through the CSM, and the step to incorporate it into the company's internal process goes a long way toward proving that their belief in player-driven experiences is no mere gimmick or promotional device. If anything, *EVE Online* appears to be achieving what many social virtual worlds backed by millions of dollars of capital—including *There* and *Second Life*—have failed to do: to create an automous, player-driven society in cyberspace. This is what CCP believes produces the absolute best games, and it's willing to take extraordinary risks to prove it.

The last day: 3 a.m.

Walking between bars in the wee hours of the morning on my last day in Reykjavík, we ran into a group of Icelanders singing and dancing down the street while another group threw beer bottles on the ground in the alleyway next to us. It suddenly hit me that *EVE Online* could only come out of a place like Iceland—a place where packs of friends wander the streets drunk until 6 a.m., doing pretty much whatever they want; a place where the only government presence I saw all week was an information center; a place where the people pretty much monitor themselves. CCP adopted this people-centric culture inside their company and inside their game, and now they're proving that giving the power to the players can work for game development as well. Self-governance has never looked quite so sexy. ■

See also: bit.ly/9lkrY9 – GoonFleet leader's profanity-filled presentation at Fanfest; bit.ly/amzSUT – The official meeting notes for the CSM summit; bit.ly/d3uaPI – Pétur's 21-page paper on the CSM; bit.ly/d2KeSx – Post-CSM forum discussion

PARTING THOUGHTS

"I'm willing to cut the devs more slack in terms of timeliness of adding some features, but I'm not gonna give them a total carte blanche on ignoring certain things."
—Asher Dratel

"I foresee great things."
—Tim Heusschen

"This could be the single most significant change in the history of *EVE*, and I'm certain it will be viewed with interest by the rest of the gaming industry...a huge leap forward."
—Jason Renouf

"The CSM has been working for two years now. Hopefully, it will work for at least 10 more."
—Tomas Ljumovic

"We can help CCP; we'll save them from themselves."
—Greg Russo

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Tethering to choppers is just one of many ways Rico avoids the boredom of walking.

Need to know

What is it?
Third-person action in an open world

Influenced by
Mercenaries 2

Play it on
Windows 7 or Vista (NOT XP)
2.6GHz dual-core CPU, 3GB RAM, GeForce GTS 250 / Radeon HD 5750

Alternatively
Red Faction: Guerrilla (88%)

Copy protection
Steam

Awesome add-on
Multirope mod: bit.ly/bjHjxS

HOOKED

Murder, terrorism and tying people to trees: the title **JUST CAUSE 2** is likely ironic ***by Tom Francis***

"All right, Rodriguez, we need you to track down your former mentor. He's gone AWOL on the island nation of Panau, so I think your first move should be to go there and start destroying water towers."

"I'm sorry?"

"Yeah, that way most of the local children will die of thirst."

"But—"

"Then you should probably get a job with the local drug cartels, terrorists and crime syndicates. Murder any politicians they haven't already corrupted, assassinate witnesses, that sort of thing."

"How will this—"

"Make sure you destroy any water towers you see along the way. Gas stations too—we don't want those damn civvies getting away."

"I really don't see—"

"Kittens, Rico! I almost forgot. If you see any, just hold them down and get out your lighter, they're surprisingly—"

"I'm going now."

Short of the kitten-melting, that's the plot of *Just Cause 2*. You earn Chaos points by destroying things people badly need to live, then commit murders for the most despicable people in the country. It's all to "force X out into the open," where X is a series of targets who apparently see terrorism as a reason to leave hiding rather than stay in it.

Luckily, this is a game about para-sailing around idyllic islands and tying people to trees, not about uncovering a coherent plot. You play as an incredible jerk with the world's best grappling hook in an astounding country. And it's wonderful.

A quick technical note: *Just Cause 2* is Vista and Windows 7 only, presumably for all the DX10 options that made it run like a dog on even our most powerful machine. Turn those off and it looks every bit as astonishing, but runs smoothly on the spec we recommend.

Air fare

The first *Just Cause* is one of my favorite games (despite some dismal missions) because of the exhilarating way you can grapple onto helicopters and other vehicles to get around. Now it's something else: You could call it *Grapplechuting*. You latch your grappling hook on to something, zip toward it, then open your parasail on your way in. Your forward velocity translates to lift, and you're airborne and scanning for the next spot to latch onto for a burst of speed.

It's unique, satisfying and even soothing; you now spend most of your time aloft, cutting swiftly through the air. It's fast enough that I did several of the car chase missions without ever touching the ground.

Yet one of the things that made *Just Cause* so fun was the thrill of falling. That's missing here. After a moment of dropping at normal speed, you switch to a skydiver pose and virtually stop, falling so slowly that opening your parachute barely makes a difference.

The land you're crossing this time is basically Heaven. Three huge islands in a sparkling sea: crinkled, snow-dusted mountains to the east, a metropolis of skyscrapers to the west and rainless expanses of rippled orange dust to the south, split by jagged gorges. It feels like a country.

There are 300 villages, military bases and airstrips speckled around the map, and

Rope vs. bad guy

Four grappling hook scenarios

Tree
Victim is strung up and flails for a while, screaming. Dies.

Gas canister
Canister can be shot to send the victim flying, screaming. Dies.

Car
Victim is dragged along the road, screaming. Dies.

Helicopter
Victim dangles below, bumping into things and screaming. Eventually dies.

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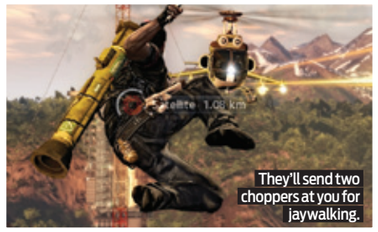
Hummers are no match for a guy with a grapple.

Tying guards together generates low-budget buddy comedies.

I almost feel bad for these guys. Almost.

What "slight turbulance" really means.


They'll send two choppers at you for jaywalking.

Not looking at explosions is just basic eye safety.

each has generators, fuel tanks, satellite dishes and yes, watertowers to destroy—anything with the government's red emblem will blow up if you shoot it hard enough. That earns you a meager sum of Chaos points, which amass to unlock the next main story mission, as well as new weapons and vehicles.

Creative destruction

You scour bases for the big guns: an armed helicopter to steal, a mounted gun to rip from its frame, the rare tank. All are free and have limitless ammo, but they also have drawbacks: heavy guns prevent your grappling to get around, tanks can't always get a bead on a target, and helicopters get shot at by any antiair launchers you haven't taken out yet.

But the destruction is gratifying, and there's a methodical pleasure to its logic. I might not get a shot at that gas tank, but I could crash that APC into it or chuck a box of grenades.

The local military sends choppers and jeeps after you for the smallest infraction. The firefights are fine: 100 times more slick than *Just Cause*'s, but never more than passable. The fun in combat is a function of the new grappling hook: not only can it latch on to objects and people, you can fire the other end to tie two things together. Such as people.

In practical terms, this is rarely a good idea. It takes about a second to aim and headshot any guard from almost any range with the basic pistol, versus three to 45 seconds to rope him, look around for something to rope him to, then find a way to make that kill him. Gas canisters are the quicker option. Helicopters take some preparation. The best stuff—tying an enemy chopper to a statue to rip its head off, or roping a car to a passenger jet then getting in before takeoff—comes from pure experimentation. *Just Cause 2* has a Ph.D in Theoretical Jackassery—its finest moments have no practical applications.

As with the idiotic plot, I have no real problem with this. What I have a problem with is that neither the main nor side missions require, encourage or, in some cases, even permit the use of the game's best feature.

I counted two instances, while completing the game and doing nearly every faction mission, that I actually needed the tethering ability for something. A few more times, it was handy but not required: to pull a jeep off a bridge or string up a demoman. Far, far more often, I had a cool idea for something to tie up, only to find you're not allowed to do it. The only enemies tough enough to be worth roping to an explosive barrel are grapple-proof, and tying two jets together just causes the rope to snap (unless you're using the handy, fun-increasing, multirope mod called BOLOpatch—get it at bit.ly/bjHjxS).

Missions untenable

With few story-provided excuses to use the game's coolest tool, the missions feel too simple. The developer, Avalanche, seems to have learned nothing from the ones everyone hated the first time.

Escort missions? Don't let the boxes fall out of this truck? Game-over screens when you stray outside the mission area? Come on, give us a sign that you understand what's good about your game. Because it's not babysitting AI, driving carefully or staying in a confined area, and you need to realize this before you make another game.

There are signs that they get it. Statues of the island's president, dotted around the island, crumble satisfyingly when tethered to a car and yanked hard. Colonels in rare military bases can be assassinated in creative ways to reduce enemy morale. And the final part of the final mission is as extreme and ridiculous as the first *Just Cause*'s laughably brilliant finale.

That game was a beautiful place you could fling yourself at. This is a beautiful place you can fling yourself at, grab on to and screw with. It's the ultimate mess-around game, a land of excited "what if" questions with explosive answers. Ignore the main missions, choose Casual difficulty, zip yourself into the air and just roam, experiment and play.■

Tourist information

What to do in Panau instead of the missions

1 Assassinate colonels
Strap C4 onto a jeep and run an enemy car over with your vehicle-bomb, then detonate.

2 Sabotage pipelines
"Let's see conduct legal fuel commerce now, you pipeline jerks!" Rico quips.

3 Topple statues
Best way to do it? Tie a passing car to the head. Sadly there's no option to beat the fallen statue with your shoe.

4 Hunt collectibles
Some of these will let you upgrade your weapons and vehicles.

5 Wreck radio towers
Cut two of the support tethers attached to these masts and they'll collapse.

It's a land of excited "what if?" questions, with explosive answers.

VERDICT

A vast and incredible playground for destructive experiments and improbable stunts. With rubbish missions.

PC GAMER 88

◆ **Price** $50 ◆ **Release** Out now ◆ **Publisher** Square Enix Europe ◆ **Developer** Avalanche ◆ **Multiplayer** None ◆ **Link** justcause.com ◆ **ESRB** M

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UNDERWATER BETA

Ubisoft takes two steps forward and three steps back with

SILENT HUNTER 5: BATTLE OF THE ATLANTIC *by Andy Mahood*

Need to know

What is it?
A WWII combat submarine simulation

Influenced by
Das Boot

Play it on
Dual-core CPU, 2GB RAM, GeForce 8800/Radeon 4850

Alternatively
Silent Hunter 4: Wolves of the Pacific (78%) + *U-boat Missions* expansion

Copy protection
Requires constant internet connection

Check out
Morale fix-mod: bit.ly/9V5s6f

No point sugarcoating it: *Silent Hunter 5: Battle of the Atlantic*, Ubisoft Romania's third crack at the *Silent Hunter* submarine sim franchise, is a dud. It's not unsalvagable—the good news is that the outstandingly proactive *SH* mod community has already repaired some of the simulation's most egregious bugs. *PCG* doesn't evaluate modded games, however, so this review will reflect *SH5* directly out of the prematurely released retail box.

On the surface

SH5 delivers some of the most spectacular maritime visuals to ever grace a PC monitor. Set once again in the tumultuous North Atlantic theater of WWII, where German U-boats crippled Allied shipping in the opening years of the war, the 10-stage branching dynamic campaign spans the period from 1939 to 1943 with seven standalone historic missions tossed in for variety. Foam-speckled waves wash over your intricately detailed Type VII *Unterseeboot* so convincingly you'd swear you were watching a modern HD documentary. Another impressive development is the game's fully-rendered 3D sub interior that you can navigate from stem to stern using FPS-style controls while conversing with key crew members. Upgraded pyrotechnic effects—from violent secondary ship explosions to smoke-belching portholes—complete the sim's remarkable sense of immersion.

A revamped user interface aimed squarely at arcade action fans is less likely to find favor with loyal sub sim aficionados. Replacing the previous chapter's elegant one-click navigation gauges and station selection icons are some stripped-down and counter-intuitive modern icons that impair the hands-on feel. The clumsy new control scheme also forces you to physically maneuver through the boat to perform some vital tasks (like diving), even when a fast-closing British destroyer is dropping shells on you.

Worse still, there's precious little documentation to help explain this radical control scheme overhaul, leaving both newbies and veteran submariners scratching their collective heads as they struggle to decipher the automated new Torpedo Data Computer procedures, crew options and navigation shortcuts.

20,000 bugs under the sea

Even when you do figure things out, *SH5's* numerous bugs and missing features will generate further anguish. Chief among these are a broken crew morale feature (that can zero out your crew's morale rating when loading a saved game), a deck gun that won't accept AI control and enough AI inconsistencies and screw-ups to scuttle half the Kriegsmarine fleet. This includes AI ships that regularly beach themselves in friendly ports, enemy warship escorts that might passively ignore you after some fresh merchant sinkings and enemy aircraft that'll sometimes blithely overfly your surfaced boat.

As bad as these gameplay issues are, they pale in comparison to *SH5's* cardinal shortcoming: its draconian DRM scheme. *PC Gamer* can't recommend purchasing any game using Ubisoft's new system, which requires a permanent net connection, where any interruption—at Ubi's end *or* yours—will terminate your game session. I experienced a handful of untimely disconnects in the midst of some intense patrols; this unpopular connectivity demand also seems to have compromised *SH5's* online multiplayer component, as it's all but impossible to find a working game.

There's a promising simulation lurking under all these hull-popping warts and hiccups, but it looks suspiciously like Ubisoft is counting on its *Silent Hunter* fan base to effect the major repairs. Too bad you can't mod out the DRM. ■

I experienced a handful of untimely disconnects in the midst of some intense patrols.

U-boat Crew Management 101

Your Executive Officer is a connected pro-Nazi with a rakish eye patch. Watch him carefully. He wants your job.

Dieter Epp is the Watch Officer who visually detects enemy ships. Unfortunately he's a nearsighted moron who can't man the deck gun.

This is your cook Olaf. His cooking is as atrocious as his violin-playing. Don't piss him off or he'll spit in your sauerkraut.

Torpedoman Kurt Faust takes care of all your little *fishes*. Upgrade his skills as fast as possible to ensure your torpedoes find their targets.

Navigator Emil Dubler is a bit of a drinker. Keep your schnapps under lock and key or you may wind up on a beach in Iceland.

◆ **Price** $50 ◆ **Release** Out now ◆ **Publisher** Ubisoft ◆ **Developer** Ubisoft Romania ◆ **Multiplayer** 8 players ◆ **Link** silenthunter5.com ◆ **ESRB** T

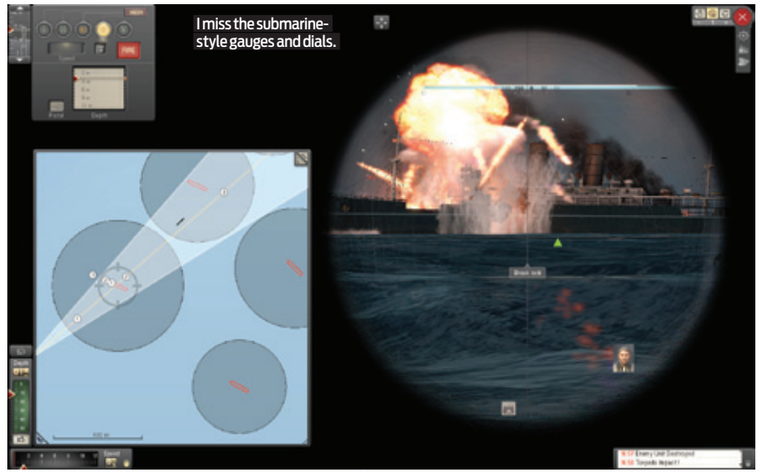
VERDICT

Although likely to be modded to perfection, *SH5's* release version is an incomplete, buggy disappointment.

PC GAMER 55

You simply won't find better water and oceanic effects than those in *SH5*.

If you want something blown up with the deck gun, you'll have to do it yourself.



I miss the submarine-style gauges and dials.

Your U-boat choices are limited to a few Type VII variants from between 1939 and 1943.

www.WorldMags.net & www.aDowns.net

TUNNEL VISION

It might be on track to become an underground hit, but **METRO 2033** occasionally threatens to turn into a train wreck ***by Martin Davies***

Need to know

What is it?
Creepy corridor shooter set in the dank subways of a postapocalyptic Moscow

Influenced by
STALKER, *BioShock*

Play it on
3GHz dual-core CPU, 2GB RAM, GeForce GTX 260/ Radeon 4870

Alternatively
Stalker: Call of Pripyat (87%)

Copy protection
Steam

My gas mask has fogged up. I'm slowly asphyxiating due to a blocked filter, and it's the last one I have. I don't know where I'm going. It's dark. My flashlight has run out of power. I think I'm being mobbed by biting mutant animals, but it's hard to tell anything through the red smear of pain and the misty, cracked visor.

In a *STALKER* game, this situation would be all my fault: its open world and large stretches of time enforce the need to plan and prepare. In horror shooter *Metro 2033*, this type of chaos is a deliberate effect of its uneven, linear design.

Your flashlight has to be regularly recharged by vigorously cranking a dynamo. Air filters need to be changed every few minutes; broken gas masks replaced; weapons reloaded a shell per click. And though you could hardly expect an easy time in the irradiated aftermath of nuclear holocaust, sometimes—as you stumble around in a circle, squinting at the screen to try and interpret the vague smudge of shapes beneath all the visual effects—*Metro 2033*'s hardships feel just a little tiresome.

On rails

The distance between carefully orchestrated tension and annoying hindrance is measured in microns, and *Metro* doesn't prove itself a precise judge. Constraints that momentarily cause panic become a bore in protraction. But worse, *Metro*'s design doesn't always seem to account for the problems it foists upon the player, plonking you back at a checkpoint with an insufficient number of filters for you to survive the subsequent cutscene. Or, less critical but just as annoying, you might find yourself with a flat battery, hit a checkpoint and then encounter one of the game's ludicrous difficulty spikes. Perhaps this one involves pacing through a derelict bunker while shooting giant glowing meatballs before they roll into you and explode. Perhaps this is also an escort mission, and your companion is a feverish, slow-moving idiot. Perhaps you play that section 20 times in a row and, after every reload, have to pick up a bunch of ammunition, load your gun and recharge your light before marching to an inevitable death.

The above is *Metro 2033* at its worst, most tedious and rigid. And it's galling that such missteps mar a game that is in other ways so richly realized. The world has been scorched, and what survives of humanity has retreated to the shelter of Moscow's underground railways to atone for its sins. But it's a far from easy redemption. Monsters besiege the small pockets of civilization that cluster around the repurposed subway stations. Worse still, humanity is still at war with itself, with ideological groups of bandits, communists and fascists forming to assert their dominance over the network of tunnels. Against this backdrop, the protagonist Artyom must make an epic journey to the *Metro*'s heart to warn the strongest, central station-state of a new menace closing in upon the fringes: a new race of mutants called, as they so often are, the Dark Ones. What follows is a linear (but mostly well-staged) sequence of thrills through familiar FPS staples, on-rails gun-turret sections and all.

Though bursts of narrative are fed to you during loading screens, it's a fiction that is best told through the environment and its profoundly dreadful atmosphere. The recreation of the Metro is the game's major coup. It's a structure born of Soviet paranoia and power—a network of armored tunnels, sunk far enough beneath Moscow's bedrock to withstand nuclear attack, while secretly interconnecting bunkers and other mysterious state objects. Having once found myself at a real-world party held in a defunct nuclear base attached to Moscow's Metro system, I can attest that 4A Games has captured the sense of this strange, secretive underworld

The recreation of the Metro is the game's major coup.

Signaling problems

Potential disruptions to your journey

Nazis on the line
Major holdups, thanks to war between fascists and communists. Try sneaking past them, then give up and kill 'em all.

Wrong type of snow
Nuclear winter has left the surface a little frosty. And radioactive. Keep your filters with you at all times.

Checkpoints failure
Please mind the gap between one save and the next. *Metro* handles this well, but occasionally frustrates.

Transhuman incident
Report suspicious activity to staff. Psychic bogeymen toy with your sanity in spooky but tightly scripted sequences.

"Don't leave me hanging, bro!"

If only the world hadn't been destroyed just before the iPad launched...

Moscow's sewer creatures now rival those of present-day New York City.

Not everybody shoots you on sight. Some are grateful for your mutant-killing help.

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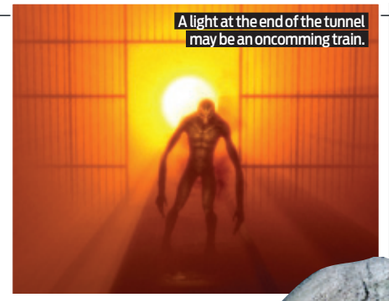
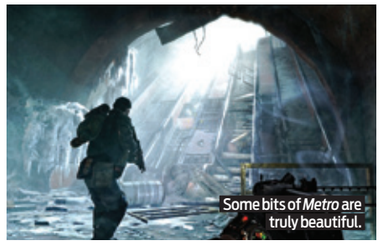

A light at the end of the tunnel may be an oncomming train.

That's what happens when you don't carry a vailid subway ticket.

This guy must have to open his mouth to blow his nose.


Some bits of *Metro* are truly beautiful.

Night vision makes things even spookier.

...and this little piggy ripped your face off.

perfectly, including the way the sound bounces around down there, the rush of air through its dark passages, the chug of unseen machinery, the cavernous hollows and claustrophobic corrugated halls. Compounding this is the Dark Ones' psychic menace, capable of sending the player into unsettling hallucinations. Your flashlight picks out shadows of people who aren't there. Rats flee unseen threats. Strange electrical phenomena float through the tunnels. The lights of nonexistent trains still travel the tracks. 4A Games, founded by members of the original *STALKER* team, show they haven't forgotten how to craft a sense of overwhelming tension, effortlessly raising hairs.

Sub-human

Well, they haven't *entirely* forgotten. *Metro* weights its blend of horror-shooter more heavily toward the latter, and, alas, the majority of its enemies aren't terribly exciting to fight. Most of the Metro's inhabitants have been trained at the Mob 'n' Melee School for Remedial AI, forcing the mobility-impaired player to trudge backwards while unloading weapons at his ankles. Human opponents are a much more exciting proposition, particularly in the later stages, when the fascist military aggressively pushes back against your assault and flushes you out with grenades—even if they do have a fondness for taking cover on the wrong side of scenery.

Some encounters are signposted as stealth sections, but after many failed attempts to remain undetected, I resorted to gunning my way through. This confusion of purpose is a problem with the game at large. It's neither very good at telling you what you are supposed to be doing, nor flexible enough to let you forge your own path. The route through the world is linear, but it's not always easy to grok, as seemingly viable routes are blocked off with invisible walls or punished with instant death. Other exits lead you back to the start—quite the irritation when you're running low on air filters. You do have some help though: the flame of your Zippo points in the immediate direction you should be taking—supposedly. In practice, this is very difficult to read and impossible while moving, since the flame gutters. And, of course, it can't be equipped at the same time as a weapon, making it all but useless in areas where respawning enemies constantly harry your progress.

Tube fare

But putting aside the time sunk into incompetent orienteering, the game manages its pace well. The Metro provides a surprisingly diverse backdrop—you'll be gunning down Nazis from a rail-mounted turret one moment, then cautiously stalking the decaying chambers of the Great Library before plummeting to the depths of a military complex. The level design is rarely novel, but often visually arresting—the dim terror of tunnels spaced with visits to the patchwork civilization preserved in the rails stations. Though interaction here is limited, they are warmly drawn dioramas.

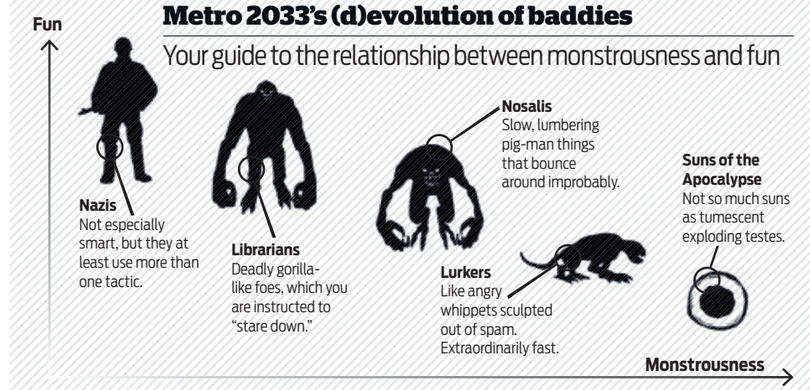
The stations also provide an opportunity to stock up. The currency here is the bullet—or, rather, the shiny, military-grade bullet—which can be exchanged for larger numbers of poorer-quality Metro-manufactured rounds. It is a slightly confusing system, and relies on you being able to identify ammo types by sight. But it's preferable to buy weapons here than scavenging them off the dead, because only weapon vendors will tell you if a gun is better or worse than the one you already wield. Even then, *Metro* withholds decent weaponry and the funds to buy them until frustratingly late in the game. Shotguns never seem to be terribly useful, and even the automatic is hampered by a painfully-slow reload time.

But this is all part of *Metro*'s drive toward creating some sense of authenticity. It sometimes deploys its constraints upon the player to great effect, forcing you into a fraught juggling act between multiple depleting resources. At other points it oversteps the mark, bogging the player down in inchoate level design and cheaply lethal enemies. But though it stumbles, it never falls, as if propped up by a staggering visual imagi-nation. It is quite a feat that, using a string of set pieces staged in such a claustrophobic environment, 4A Games manages to insinuate miles and miles of tunnels stretching out into the dark. It may not always be the most endearing place, or its occupants the most engaging playmates, but its gloomy world still begs to be explored. ■

Human opponents are a more exciting proposition, particularly in the later stages.

Metro 2033's (d)evolution of baddies

Your guide to the relationship between monstrousness and fun



VERDICT

Periodically veers toward mediocrity, but wrapped in a richly drawn world that transcends the game's flaws—just barely.

PC GAMER 77

◆ **Price** $50 ◆ **Release** Out now ◆ **Publisher** THQ ◆ **Developer** 4A Games ◆ **Multiplayer** none ◆ **Link** metro2033game.com ◆ **ESRB** M

www.WorldMags.net & www.aDowns.net

UNSETTLING

The beauty, brains and mathematical sadism of THE SETTLERS 7: PATHS TO A KINGDOM *by Alec Meer*

Need to know

What is it?
An RTS that's heavy on city building

Influenced by
Dawn of Discovery

Play it on
3GHz CPU, 2GB RAM, GeForce 8800GT/ Radeon 4850

Alternatively
Caesar IV

Copy protection
Requires constant internet connection

The Settlers: Loads of Really Long, Complicated Paths to Building Even a Single Damn Thing, more like. The latest update to the real-time strategy/city builder series that makes gentlemen of a certain age turn misty-eyed and start muttering about Amigas is a ferociously complicated affair. It abandons the cheerfully dawdling pace of many of its predecessors in favor of something that can feel like a math exam. In fact, I'll refer to this cartoonish medieval economy-and-warfare title as *The Maths: Maths to a Math* from this point onwards.

The phrase, "It's very German," ricocheted repeatedly around the *PC Gamer* office whenever the game was played, partly because we're horribly prone to racial stereotyping and partly because, well...it is a game of efficiency. If something is inefficient, the game lets you know and visibly causes your economy to atrophy. If you can achieve a state where at least 50 percent of your buildings *don't* have an angry red exclamation mark over them, you're doing well.

Beer for life

Fundamentally, it's a game of supply lines. To summarize very broadly, soldiers need weapons need blacksmiths need gold needs mines need workers need food need farmers need houses need space, space, space. Except it's nowhere near that simple—there's a cause and effect to almost everything you build. Building clerics (necessary to research new technology and upgrades) requires beer, which requires grain. But, if you want to get anything built, you'll also need a whole lot of bread to feed your populace, which requires flour—which also requires grain. In the limited space you have available, do you build grain barns to further booze production, or windmills to mass-produce your own bread? Ideally, you'll have a dedicated farm for both, but good luck finding enough room for them. Fail to learn every building's requirements and consequences and you'll inevitably end up deep in a domino effect that causes all your production grind to a standstill.

Be flippant and die

This happened in one of our multiplayer games—both players were totally stymied for a good 10 minutes while we (deep breath) demolished and rebuilt and prioritized and traded in a desperate attempt to lay hands on the resources necessary to build tools so we could mine some gold ore and build a mint to create gold coins to buy some soldiers to go grab a new territory to have the space to build some tools to mine some gold ore and build a mint…and so on and so on. If that sentence makes no sense to you, keep your insult against my reckless grammar-butchery to yourself and bear in mind that this is what the game is like. To cheerily decide "ooh, I think I'll build a soldier now" can be fatal—you have to be thinking in chains at all times. Many resources are finite, so unless you've also mastered the over-complicated trade system, you'll eventually ram that pretty head of yours into the hard ceiling of what you can afford to build.

All of those words above probably sound a lot like whining. Well, maybe they are a little bit, but really, they're setting the scene. This is what you're signing up for with *The Maths: Maths to a Math*. The massive upside is that mastering all these systems grants you access to an exceptionally clever game that's determined to provide substantial strategy to those who crave it. It might seem impossibly convoluted and determined to run you into repeated brick walls to start with, but

Building clerics requires beer, which requires grain.

Soldier for hire

Building a single spearman in *Settlers 7* is easy—just follow these six complicated steps

Gold needs mines
To make a basic pikeman, you need food and gold. So, you'll need a gold deposit, a lodge and a gold mine.

Mines need wood
I'm all out of tools for my gold miners. For that, I need to build a residence with a toolmakers' workyard.

Wood needs tools
This needs wood, which requires a lodge with a woodcutter workyard. Which requires tools to staff.

Tools need iron
The toolmaker needs iron bars, which requires an iron mine, and an iron smelter workyard... all of which need tools.

Iron needs gold
Sigh. So, If I'm to get any gold, I need tools. So I'll go buy some from the tavern. Which requires gold.

I need therapy
I demolish half my city to get the tools. I'm on the verge of hiring that pikeman when the food crisis hits.

The most cheerful slaughter ever!

The trade system involves a whole new map and menu.

That beard cost me 30 loaves of bread.

Careful what you build, as you may need to demolish it later.

Take care of your soldiers—they take *forever* to make.

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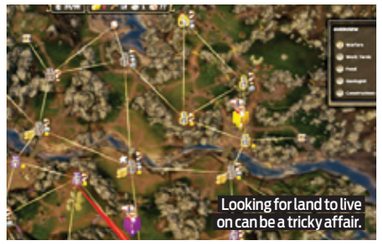


get past that and it's truly impressive how balanced this thing is.

Health and efficiency

The central idea is that you can pursue victory via military might, scientific progress or financial steamrolling. As long as you can provide the economy, combat itself is much more in keeping with the rest of the game than the more overtly RTS-like fights the last couple of *Settlers* offered. Via a very fiddly series of menus, which are probably the game's worst feature, you select your guys, then send 'em to whatever territory you want to grab. As long as you have a greater advantage of numbers and have ascertained which units and structures the enemy is defended with, you can then build counter-units accordingly. Your army will do the hard work for you.

Indirect combat suits this game perfectly, but it's often frustrating that it takes so much hard graft and so long to get to the point where you can field a halfway decent army.

The same is true of the other trees. Research, for instance, involves meeting certain requirements and constructing purely decorative buildings to increase your prestige level, which in turn unlocks church upgrades, which permit recruitment of more superior holy men, which are spent on higher-tier research, which eventually nets you improved production and bonus victory points. It's not so much that there's a lot involved, but that it takes so long and there are so many ways in which it can silently grind to a halt.

"What's the quickest way to win?" I was asked at one point, as I waited for a critical iron drought to resolve itself. There isn't one. Again, this is, ah, very German. Remain true to your chosen path and you'll spot the fascinating ways in which balance emerges: donating excess clerics to your castle to raise your city's defense rating, sending expensive traders to distant climes to spend your gold on the resources necessary to speed-build soldiers and prestigious buildings, sacrificing spare troops to a fight against a horde of marauders, bothering a neutral observatory to gain mega-bonuses…

The two routes to victory

You take the high road, I'll take the low road—and I'll have more victory points

Economy 7

Even a single misstep can put your economy out of whack for long enough to cost you the game. In a way, that makes it rather exciting—a true test of will and observational prowess. Oddly, it's the closest a *Settlers* game has ever been to *The Settlers of Catan*, the great board game the series is often erroneously thought to have been inspired by.

There's a big, fat, hyperlogical reward here for those willing to put the time in, but it seems terminally confused as to whether (and how) to welcome those who don't already think in the hyperefficient way it demands. The cute-but-lavish visuals will be an instant draw to any passerby, but one hover over the inventory screen, with its couple of dozen different resources, will send most people off screaming.

The early tutorials, with neat little wizards showing how to start off a match/mission, make it seem more accessible than any other strategy game you care to name. But 20 minutes later you've got a swarm of red exclaimations all over your grumbling town and no idea how to get hold of more gold, now that the mine's depleted. It's a contradictory thing—so chummy, but so unforgiving. Sometimes it seems as though the beautiful engine was made first, with as many random bits of strategy game as the devs could think of heaped on top of it; other times, it's as though someone's years-in-the-making masterplan has been made flesh no matter the cost, with accessibility a distant second interest.

Add this towering, unforgiving complexity to the now-infamous Ubisoft DRM system, which requires you to be online all the time, unceremoniously kicking you out if your connection drops, and you're looking at a game which really isn't suitable for casual gamers. Given that *The Settlers* series was built upon its appeal to a non-hardcore audience, this makes unlucky number seven here just a wee bit perverse. At the same time, it's an extraordinarily thoughtful and attractive game, and mastering its many nuances and foibles is a challenge that'll last you a long while. Seriously, it'll be ages before you even see a cannon. ■

There's a big, fat reward here for those willing to put the time in.

VERDICT

Beautiful and challenging, but the relentless and overcomplicated micromanagement can be exhausting.

PC GAMER 70

◆ **Price** $50 ◆ **Release** Out now ◆ **Publisher** Ubisoft ◆ **Developer** Blue Byte
◆ **Multiplayer** Up to 4 players ◆ **Link** thesettlers.com ◆ **ESRB** E

www.WorldMags.net & www.aDowns.net

D-back fans may have to get used to seeing their team defeated and on their backs.

Some fielding animations look perfectly natural, others are plain broken.

The new batting system is difficult to master but highly rewarding.

Double-plays are a joy to watch, and they finally feel natural to pull off.

Twirling the gamepad thumbstick to execute pitches is surprisingly effective.

SOLO SHOT

It may be the only ticket in town, but at least **MLB 2K10** is a decent seat *by Ryan McCaffrey*

Need to know

What is it?
The officially licensed Major League Baseball game

Influenced by
High Heat 2002, *MVP 2005*

Play it on
Dual-core CPU, 2GB RAM, GeForce 7900GT/Radeon X1900, Xbox 360 gamepad

Alternatively
MVP Baseball 2005 (85%)

Copy protection
Disc check

Check out
MVP Baseball 2005 mods: bit.ly/bSSAKC

Dedicated PC hardballers have been modding and updating *MVP Baseball 2005* the past five years for a reason: it's the videogame baseball equivalent of the 1927 New York Yankees. Nearly perfect in all key aspects of our national pastime, it boasts slick signature animations, impeccable AI and even a full minor-league system. It's still the king. By comparison, this year's pro-licensed game, *Major League Baseball 2K10*, is more akin to the good-enough-to-win 2006 St. Louis Cardinals.

2K10 successfully patches up the glaring holes in its swing, though its single major innovation is the engaging My Player mode that lets you quickly breeze through minor league games using your own avatar as he tries to make it to The Show. Small improvements to fielding add up to rein in last year's circus, which felt like trying to steer a headless chicken as you circled under fly balls. Players also no longer dive over grounders or commit unforgivable, idiotic sins, like throwing to the wrong base. Instead, you feel in control, right down to the welcome ability to pre-load throws before the ball lands in your glove, a feature that smoothes out double-play turns and tag-up throws. It's a long-overdue feature (lifted from *MVP 2005*), but we'll take it.

Power hitter

Batting is also the best it's ever been in this series. A tweaked camera gives you a better look at how the ball breaks, an upgraded pitching AI will actually try to make you chase balls out of the strike zone, and a defensive swing mechanic that lets you stay alive by flicking left or right on the right stick to try to foul a pitch off. Believe it or not, you'll actually have to play smart this year, working yourself into advantageous hitters' counts before it will throw you something good to whack.

Curveball

Pitching underwent the least amount of surgery this season, as its gesture-based controls didn't really need it. Twirl your gamepad's thumbstick in indicated directions to execute different pitch types—pitching gets a bit tougher as your hurler fatigues, but never feels too easy or too gimmicky.

Regrettably, a bizarre lack of check swings completely contradicts the analog stick-driven batting mechanic, and an obvious case of "File->Save As" from the Xbox version means that PC performance leaves something to be desired, even as a few horrific textures bring the visuals down. Still, this series is finally moving *up* in the standings. ■

VERDICT

A quality baseballer that nails key fundamentals but doesn't knock anything out of the park.

PC GAMER **78**

◆ **Price** $30 ◆ **Release** Out now ◆ **Publisher** 2K Games ◆ **Developer** Visual Concepts ◆ **Multiplayer** 2 players (online or on one PC), 30-player online leagues ◆ **Link** 2ksports.com/games/mlb2k10 ◆ **ESRB** E

Now may not be the time for mid-battle sunbathing.

ROMMEL RUMBLE

Tank warfare is serious business in **THEATRE OF WAR: AFRICA 1943** *by Tom Senior*

If there's one thing I've learned from this hyper-realistic real-time strategy game, it's that being shot by a tank is no joke. *Theatre of War: Africa 1943* models every single slug, and a handy graphic on the interface shows the aftermath of every shot fired. That last impact penetrated my Sherman's forward armor, wounded gunner Andrew Jones in the chest and blew out the back, setting the engine and the rest of the tank on fire.

Set in Tunisia during the time of "Desert Fox" Erwin Rommel's final clash with British and American forces, *Theatre of War* throws you into huge arenas and asks you to micromanage your way to victory. Even grizzled strategy veterans will be taken aback by the level of detail crammed into the battle system. Each soldier has their own strengths and weaknesses, and using the menus that precede each fight, you can assign individual soldiers to posts in each unit.

Peel back the slightly clunky interface and you'll find this attention to detail on the battlefield as well. Each infantryman has their own inventory and line of sight rules. Projectiles ricochet accurately, and tank crews who have bailed out of their broken ride can pick up guns and join the fight.

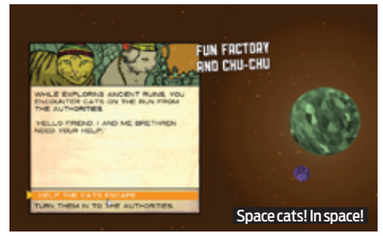
Sadly, having developed this staggeringly deep war engine, *Theatre of War* doesn't quite know what to do with it. The three mission series let you take charge of Axis and Allied forces, presenting faintly interesting scenarios based on historically accurate battles, but the combination of linear progress, lackluster objectives and monotonous desert locales suck the drama out of the war.

A few technical warts don't help, either. The framerate dips constantly, the limited array of unit barks gets old fast and, eerily enough, there's no music at all.

The *Theatre of War* series might well be one to watch, but for now there are better options available. If you're interested in fighting Rommel's wars in Tunisia then *Combat Mission: Afrika Korps* will serve you well. Alternatively, *Men of War* provides a more thrilling and explosive take on the military sim. ■

PC GAMER **66**

◆ **Price** $30 ◆ **Release** Out now ◆ **Publisher** Excalibur ◆ **Developer** 1C ◆ **Multiplayer** Up to 8 players ◆ **Link** bit.ly/ckw8MF ◆ **ESRB** T



Space cats! In space!

Homeworld meets Disney for some space adventures in **FLOTILLA**

Have you heard the one about a fleet of spaceships cruising around in a universe where cats are smugglers, deer are authoritarian police and a hauntingly beautiful piano track plays in the background? It's no joke—it's *Flotilla*.

Playing is a series of bizarre, oddly compelling choose-your-own-adventure style decisions that may lead to battles, new parts or ships, or more complex decisions further in. The turn-based combat is simple yet brilliant—position your ships to hit the weak rear and bottom armor of enemy ships while protecting your own weak sides. *Flotilla* is a charmingly crafted bite-size portion of tactical fun. ■ ***Erik Belsaas***

PC GAMER **81**

◆ **Price** $10 ◆ **Release** Out now ◆ **Link** bit.ly/9B0hkM ◆ **ESRB** NA

Penguins. Why did it have to be penguins?

Crazy, cool, action fun in **ROCKETBIRDS: REVOLUTION**

You are Hardboiled, the Original Cock of War—a soldier chicken, that is—and you're fighting to save the world from the evil penguin dictator Putzuki. The Flash-powered, old-school 2D platformer *Rocketbirds* has you jumping, climbing, shooting and running through obstacles and occasional cunning physics puzzles.

Hardboiled's controls have a steep learning curve, but the gritty cartoon art style and fluidity of his animations are incredibly rewarding as he smoothly transitions from sliding on the ground to roundhouse kicking a commie penguin. Though it's short for the money, *Rocketbirds* is a visually delightful and fun romp. ■ ***Erik Belsaas***

PC GAMER **78**

◆ **Price** $10 ◆ **Release** Out now **Link** bit.ly/aDTkxI ◆ **ESRB** NA

www.WorldMags.net & www.aDowns.net

ASTRAL PLAIN

Surf the astral realm in your mighty space galleon, then kill 10 boars in **ALLODS ONLINE** *by Tom Senior*

Need to know

What is it?
Free-to-play fantasy MMORPG of floating islands and flying ships

Influenced by
World of Warcraft, the fever dreams of an elf

Play it on
2GHZ dual-core CPU, 512MB RAM, GeForce 8800GT/ Radeon 4850

Alternatively
Flyff

Copy protection
Log in required

Say the words "free-to-play MMO" and you may immediately think of one of the millions of low-tech Flash and Java games that populate the web. Nival Interactive is looking to buck this trend with *Allods Online*, a beautiful and fully-featured MMO that's as free to download and play as the air you're breathing.

The titular Allods are island worlds, drifting through the nebulous astral plane where a great war is being fought between the goody-goody League and the evil Empire. All you have to do to join the war is download the client, log in and pick a side.

World of Warcraft players will be right at home. Character classes come in familiar flavors, and all of your traditional MMO archetypes are represented. Whether you favor tanks or healers, melee or magic, the detailed class system will let you carefully tailor your build. Combat is your typical MMO mix of activating abilities and waiting for cooldown timers, and there's a swath of crafting options on top of all this to keep item hunters hooked. Mechanically, *Allods Online* gives us nothing new, but it's a familiar experience that's elevated by a wonderful world.

From the kittenish Gibberlings to the skeletal, bionic forms of the Arisen, these island worlds are bursting with some beautiful and original visual design. Walking along the shore of an Allod lets you peer into astral space, where ships can be seen sailing through the coiling purple nebulae. It's a rich and surprising place that's a joy to explore. If the same creative effort had been applied to the rest of the game, *Allods Online* could have been something really special.

Mind the grind

In spite of the wonderful premise, your progression from island to island is disappointingly linear. You'll find yourself questing in the same area for an age, grinding out your allotted tasks until the game allows you to move on. This exposes *Allods Online*'s greatest flaw: the quest design, which is often so dull it borders on self-parody. In one stretch, I was told to kill 15 boars, then 12 sabertooth squirrels, then 15 gray wolves, then 10 angry bees. I lost track of the amount of time I spent wandering around a forest waiting for more cute baby brown bears to spawn so I could slaughter them for their hides.

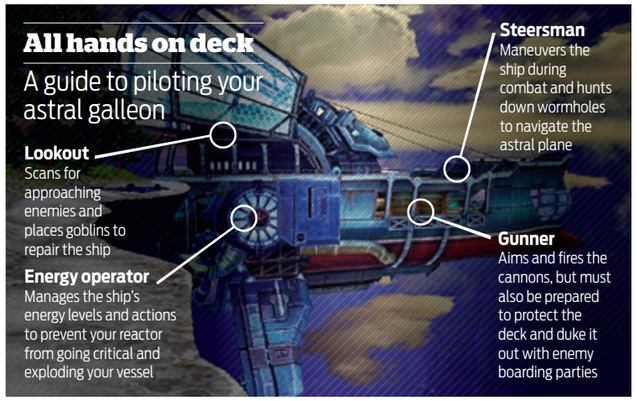
There is light at the end of the tunnel for dedicated players in the form of a system of arenas and ship-to-ship combat. Reach level 20, and League and Empire players quest on the same Allods. Raising your flag of war in these areas earns you extra experience for your quests, but leaves you open to attack from other players. There are also much larger dedicated PvP battlegrounds that pit League against Empire in epic battles, but to enjoy them fully you'll need to pay. Death leaves you with a damaging debuff that can last up to 51 minutes for high-level characters. To remove these effects and stay competitive you'll have to chug Perfumes, which can be bought with real money from the item shop. For regular PvPers and raiders, this will add up to a monthly expense that's roughly equivalent to the cost of your average subscription MMO.

Allods Online saves the best until last. At the very highest levels you and your friends can build your own galleon and explore the astral plane yourselves, discovering new Allods and fighting the huge demons that populate the space between all the islands. It's a unique and spectacular way to access the finest loot, but you'll need a callous disregard for local wildlife and the patience of a saint to stand a chance of even thinking about grinding your way to the intriguing endgame. ■

The quest design is often so dull it borders on self-parody.

All hands on deck

A guide to piloting your astral galleon



◆ **Price** Free ◆ **Release** Out now ◆ **Publisher** gPotato ◆ **Developer** Nival Interactive
◆ **Multiplayer** Massively ◆ **Link** bit.ly/sFcEP ◆ **ESRB** NR

VERDICT

A gorgeous world dogged by some terrible quest design. PvP thrills and ship combat redeem it all—but only if you're willing to pay.

PC GAMER **60**

Logan's wish for a giant squirrel friend ends in terror.

Demon off the starboard...I mean port. No, wait...

Adorable Gibberlings always travel in triplicate.

Blue and gold bathrobes are totally *in* this year.

RIP Captain Jenkins, master of the suicidal charge.

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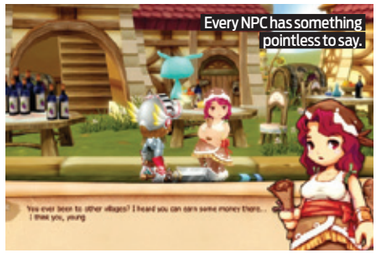

DRAGGING ON

Combo multipliers and high scores can't cover up **DRAGONICA**'s questing and grinding *by Jaz McDougall*

Need to know

What is it?
Simplified fantasy MMORPG with plenty of shiny loot

Influenced by
Anime, *Streets of Rage*, fat stacks of cash

Play it on
2.4GHz CPU, 1GB RAM, GeForce 6600GT/Radeon X600

Alternatively
Maple Story

Copy protection
Online login required

You'd be forgiven for brushing *Dragonica* off as just another pseudo-medieval fantasy wallet-vampire. Because it is, kind of. It's a free-to-play mash-up between an MMORPG and an arcade brawler, but with a real-cash shop that sells useless-but-lovely dresses and hats.

The way the tutorial is presented says it all: this game is obviously for the kiddies. Everything is very slowly explained using giant fonts and a blue guy who floats after you and repeats things. Four big, colorful character classes—the tough melee Warrior, the fireball-spitting Magician, the versatile Archer and the claw-wielding Thief—complete the My-First-MMO feel.

From there, it gets bizarre. The first mission is to kill five tree stumps. The grander Hero Missions are interspersed with campy, relentlessly cheery cutscenes. "Oh look, the Doctor didn't kidnap the Mayor's daughter, she just followed him because he nabbed her dog! Oh look, that big wolf was her dog! Oh look, that gorgeous dress I've been after just dropped!" From the moment you accept a quest to kill 10 vicious sheep, you know this game is on borrowed time.

The best thing going for *Dragonica* is the addictive combat. It's a sidescrolling rampage through quaint towns filled with silly enemies who spew loot and respawn in moments. The constant journey to the right contributes further to the arcade feel—you're always pushing deeper into wolf-infested farmland, slashing and bashing and racking up combo points that give bonuses to your experience point gain. But you're never able to rack up a combo count higher than 60 before everything is dead or too far away.

You're never really in danger—a casual stroll outpaces the terrifying Sheep Lord and his Infernal Flock. I had to solo the four-man Hero Missions to get some challenge out of it. Those missions are pretty cool—there's a timer and a running score-o-meter to tell you how you're doing, and there are plenty of enemies for those massive combos.

If there were just thicker clusters of enemies that never let up, you could get a decent combo going and feel like you were in the zone. If there were more devastatingly silly attacks, it'd be more fun to blast through the hordes of bats and raccoons. Hordes of enemies are fine if they feel like hordes of enemies, but these are more like clumps of hit points that swat at you occasionally.

Dragonica is a colorful diversion, but it's just not hard, fun, or good enough. After a few days of play, even the promise of the prettiest dress in the land can't keep my interest.

VERDICT

Kids might enjoy *Dragonica* as a starter MMO, but once they get started they'll want something more.

PC GAMER **65**

◆ **Price** Free ◆ **Release** Out now ◆ **Publisher** gPotato ◆ **Developer** Barunson ◆ **Multiplayer** Massively ◆ **Link** en.dragonica.gpotato.eu ◆ **ESRB** NR

MUDDLED

Broadcasting biz sim **MUD TV** is worse than public access *by Martin Davies*

Like many a megalomaniac with a Humanities degree, I often imagine myself in the role of a TV programming director, sneaking my poisonous propaganda into the malleable minds of the viewers. But if I had a talent for it, I wouldn't know by playing *MUD TV*.

There are good ideas in here somewhere. It's a management sim that flavors the intricate workings of broadcast media with deeply Machiavellian tactics: you're encouraged to study viewing habits, spy on your competitors and then torpedo their lackluster chat shows with a demographic-pampering action escapade. But elsewhere, the simulation breaks down into unintuitive abstraction. Intellectual actors slow down productions, but big egos make them work faster. In-game email alerts offer truncated messages, cropping important details. Interfaces are cluttered with text, rendering vital information obscured.

The game wants you to be fiddling constantly, so it creates meaningless work. Revenue comes from advertisement, but the factors affecting it are infuriatingly difficult to assess. For example, clicking on an ad won't tell you if you've already assigned it a slot in your schedule unless it's been aired—and you're slapped with a massive fine if you miss deadlines. Using the facilities of your station is only possible if you physically move your avatar there. You have to catch an elevator to the lobby when you want to hire an employee or buy an ad. A new program doesn't simply appear on a list available for airing—you must get it from Production by dragging it to your PDA, taking it over to the archive, dragging it into a window there, walking to the executive suite and dragging it out of another window on to the schedule. There is much dragging, in every sense.

Perhaps this is supposed to bring a frenetic pace to an otherwise-pedestrian sim. It doesn't. So much is buried beneath the fussy, pointless obligation to waddle around your media empire like a minimum-wage gopher that the game doesn't stand a chance of charming you when the real competition kicks in. It's all too easy to find yourself in a feedback loop that sends you spiraling into bankruptcy after one initial misstep. *MUD TV*'s detail is swamped in white noise, and no amount of fiddling with the antennae will help a game so poorly tuned.

PC GAMER **45**

◆ **Price** $20 ◆ **Release** Out now ◆ **Publisher** Kalypso ◆ **Developer** Realmforge ◆ **Multiplayer** Up to 8 players ◆ **Link** mud-tv.com ◆ **ESRB** NR

PC GAMER

How we review

Wherever possible, we finish every game before finalizing the review. We review each game on its own merits and match it to a reviewer who's a passionate expert in the field. The primary aim of the reviews section is to help you make buying decisions. As such, we'll review paid-for content of all types in addition to the latest big-name releases.

Our scoring system explained

0-30% Intolerable
A crime against gaming. Whether it's bugs or bad design, this should be shot on sight.

31-45% Weak
Serious flaws ruin any chance this game has of offering sustained fun.

46-60% Mediocre
A very ordinary game, quickly forgotten. Think twice even if you find it cheap.

61-75% Fair
A decent effort that, but for a little more polish, coulda been a contender.

76-89% Good
Enjoyable, well-made and entertaining—just falling short of true greatness.

90%+ Editor's Choice
Oozing class, this is the work of experts at the top of their game. Bravo, sirs!

PC GAMER EDITORS' CHOICE ★★★★★

A game scoring 90% or more is the proud recipient of a PC Gamer Editor's Choice award. The Editor's personal seal of approval means we think the recipient is a truly great example of its genre.

PC Gamer's 10 Latest and Greatest

Dawn of War II: Chaos Rising (91%)
May '10

Mass Effect 2 (90%)
March '10

BioShock 2 (90%)
March '10

Left 4 Dead 2 (92%)
January '10

Dragon Age: Origins (92%)
Holiday '09

Batman: Arkham Asylum (93%)
December '09

Resident Evil 5 (93%)
November '09

Streetfighter IV (92%)
October '09

Fallout 3: Broken Steel (90%)
August '09

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REINSTALL

CLASSICS OF PC GAMING REVISITED

Ah, the dirty bar setting brings back memories.

Crack the code
The most fun on the table is easily had by spinning the tumbler to crack the safe.

Money money
Once you've cracked the safe, launch the ball inside for massive points and watch it fly back out onto the table.

Broke?
As a robber, head to the bank to take out a free "personal loan."

Call for backup
This third flipper is perfect for getting an extra hit on the tumbler.

Follow the crime
Track your progress as the crook perpetrating or cop preventing the big heist with this bar.

Bump 'er
Hitting the bumper doesn't knock the stripper's clothes off, but it does make her moan.

Pin Brawl

THE AGE OF **PINBALL SIMS** IS PAST, BUT A FEW GEMS REMAIN

READ ME
Pure Pinball 2 REDUX
GET IT FOR
$6, GOG.com (including soundtrack)
Pro Pinball: Big Race USA
GET IT FOR
$6, GOG.com
SlamIt Pinball: Big Score
GET IT FOR
$5, Steam

Logan I don't remember *Pure Pinball 2 REDUX*, and I thought I'd played every pinball sim on the planet. I was absolutely blown away by the physics. They're ever-so-slightly bouncy, but pinballs roll on the flipper and carom off obstacles without suspicion. And I nearly wet myself laughing when I noticed that the pinball itself reflects the player (if you happen to be a teenage Caucasian guy in a t-shirt). Nice touch!

Josh Seriously? I thought the physics were ridiculously forgiving on the flippers, not only hitting when it shouldn't, but instead of knicking it off to one side, the ball blasts off as if you had slammed it perfectly in the middle of the flipper.

But that's kind of beside the point, because I want PC pinball games to be *outlandishly awesome*, not mere simulation limited by boring ol' physics and reality. So I was a little disappointed by this—I *really* wanted the train in the Runaway Train table to move around the screen, but it didn't. It was sitting there in the corner on tracks, with nowhere to go.

Erik Uh, yeah, what's so runaway about a train that just sits there?

Josh In a real pinball machine, that makes sense—it can't go anywhere because it's stuck inside the machine and it doesn't have much space to move in without busting through the glass. In a pinball videogame, I want it to spit tracks out of its steam pipe that fall into place literally milliseconds before it drives over them, cruise around the table picking little animated people up and barrel out the side of the machine, blowing a hole in it before it goes.

Logan Mmm, agreed. Sierra was one of the few developers that understood that hyperrealistic pinball sims didn't necessarily make for great PC games. The *3D Ultra Pinball* series used the entire screen as a playboard and had—yep—trains, spaceships and ghosts whisking the ball around. *3D Ultra Pinball: Creep Night* even had animated zombies as challenge targets—something real pinball machines would have done if they could. So, with its great physics but somewhat generic table, I'd agree that *PP2* is high on craftsmanship, but skimpy on inspiration.

Pick 'em up!
Repeatedly knock the ball into the taxi cab to pick up passengers and keep on the move.

Speed trap
Highway Patrol: a speeding taxi driver's archnemesis.

Junk in the trunk
Real men choose the mystery prize. Open the trunk and brave the unknown!

Invisible aliens
Apparently there are aliens, but they never showed their eight-eyed faces while we played.

Cartographer
Keeps track of the cities you visit on your cross-country road trip.

Flipper Fun
The simplest of pinball rules: don't miss the ball.

No freeloaders
Collect fares from the people you're shuttling around to earn points.

Just a mountain
You can shoot the ball along a path under the mountain, but don't expect anything exciting to happen.

The tower is a lie
Don't believe everything you read; there's no water tower back there.

Wood beats metal
If this wooden ball does more than jiggle slightly when hit, we couldn't figure out what it is.

"Water" to "Crash"
The only table where successfully progressing leads to the fiery demise of everyone in the game.

Misleading
There's nothing "runaway" about this completely immobile, plain ol' train.

That's about it
This table is boring.

Josh The single board on *Pro Pinball: Big Race USA* was more fun than the other four from *PP2* (with three tables) and *SlamIt Pinball: Big Score* combined. *SlamIt* had great physics, but the entire bottom half of the machine was *booooring*—just wasted, empty space.

Erik Not to mention, *SlamIt* was confusing. You can pick characters from the Police Force and Thief Gang, but I couldn't tell what difference it made, if it made any at all. What's the point?

Logan Yeah, again, it's a pinball sim picking up the worst habits of real pinball machines, like being a tightwad with special challenges and offering too few clues about how to trigger them.

Josh Which brings up bad memories of the arcade, where I was always suspicious that every game was trying to sabotage my performance at every opportunity so it could eat more of my money. I didn't feel that so much with *Big Race USA*. The visual feedback is much better, and it's easier to understand what's happening: The police car turns on its pole to face you and it's got evil-eye headlights—you understand that it's chasing you, and then the "getaway" targets light up. It's instinctive. You know what to do.

Erik And the concepts behind *Big Race USA* were much better. You were actually trying to navigate the ball into a taxi over and over to ferry around strange characters (like old grannies or alien creatures) across the country. It also had some of the most random point bonuses I've ever seen, like, for instance, a trunk that you could risk opening instead of getting a set amount of points.

Josh Who can resist a mystery prize? Not this guy. I took the trunk *every time* and was handsomely rewarded with 200 million points. As my dad always said, "I'd rather be lucky than good."

Logan I noticed you can adjust the table slant in *Big Race USA*. Might "lucky" have had anything to do with that?

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Stompy robots, resurrected in *Crysis*.

1 Mech my day

MOD MECHWARRIOR: LIVING LEGENDS SALVAGES A CLASSIC

I spent most of the mid '90s stomping around in the cockpit of a Battlemech, PPCing and lasering the arms off of other robots. While we await further news on the *MechWarrior* reboot, *Living Legends* serves as an excellent modernization of the classic series, beautifully rendered by the still-powerful *Crysis* engine.

The design is somewhere between an online shooter and a more detailed sim, catering to both newcomers and veterans. Joystick compatibility compliments a pleasantly huge array of keyboard commands.

Players can build a huge range of vehicular death, ranging from a lowly truck with rockets on it, all the way to a massive stompy robot with rockets on it. The extensive customization, a hallmark of the franchise, enables you to switch those rockets for gauss rifles, or machineguns, or one of many other types of murder. The mod team also has plans for infantry, including the armor-suited, jetpacking Clan elemental units.

Living Legends is an incredibly deep game and a professional conversion job by the team, already pleasing the exacting types who have the key to eject the coolant hard-wired in their brains. It's been in beta since February, and there's already a dedicated community. Now is the perfect time to jump-jet into *Living Legends*. **Evan Lahti**

SIZE 1.5GB LINK bit.ly/4ewyh3

2 WEBGAME

CONFUSED CLASSIC

PLAY *FIRST-PERSON TETRIS*

Bleurgh, I'm going to be sick. *First-Person Tetris* doesn't quite do what you'd expect from the name, preferring instead to rotate your entire world-view when you attempt to rotate the falling blocks.

Severe disorientation results as down becomes up, up becomes sideways and your lunch becomes your lap decoration. It's *Tetris*, but with the added benefit of making you tilt your head like a confused Labrador.

The familiar game quickly becomes alien. Blocks that would normally be slammed into useful gaps end up misjudged and protruding; carefully-constructed chasms waiting for a line piece are left unfilled. If you manage to master it, you are superhuman. Or have a very flexible neck. **Richard McCormick**

SIZE Browser-based
LINK bit.ly/8EUdK5

Do not adjust your magazine.

3 Rebel scum

MOD GALACTIC WARFARE RELOCATES *COD4* TO MOS EISLEY

In a *Star Wars* shooter, you can always tell what team someone's on by the color of their blaster bolt. I like that. Still in beta, *Galactic Warfare* has already put the smooth-running *Call of Duty 4* engine to work building weapons and player skins from the ground up, giving you the choice between Rebel or Imperial forces in *MW*'s existing multiplayer modes.

Players are restricted to a single map set in everyone's favorite hive of scum, villainy, and cantina bands—Mos Eisley—but the mod's creators are fixing their hyperdrive to include a whole bag of levels (based on the original trilogy) in the full release. Eagle-eyed nerds will spot expertly textured nods to the films that are dotted around the Tatooine township: Look, there's Luke's X34 landspeeder that he sold for 2,000 credits under its market value to pay Han, and hey, it's a TIE bomber replacing *MW*'s airstriking fighter jets.

That kind of detailed touch (the blaster SFX are even pew-pewier than we remember) shows what we've lost with Infinity Ward's decision to close *Modern Warfare 2* off to modders. Get on board and support the team. **Richard McCormick**

SIZE 255MB LINK bit.ly/6MibGE

Only one map, but *look* at it.

"These aren't the droids you're –AA*HHHH!*"

www.WorldMags.net & www.aDowns.net

Do a bit better, down where it's wetter

GET STARTED

DIFFICULTY Medium
TIME 8 hours
VITAL LINKS

A list of all the unlockable audio diaries, weapons and plasmids, sorted by rank
bit.ly/cfRxZB

The *BioShock 2* multiplayer wiki
bit.ly/1l4vDe

Why *BioShock 2*'s MP exists
bit.ly/cDGiAP

QUINTIN SMITH ON BEING THE BIGGEST DADDY IN **BIOSHOCK 2**

I can see you now, half-crazed from having finished *BioShock 2*'s single-player story. You haven't eaten a morsel in seven hours, and you can only speak in Big Daddy whale moans. But you still want more—more plot, more yogurt-thick atmosphere, more undersea action.

Good news: there is more. But you'll have to play the multiplayer to get it. Fight well and you're rewarded with audio diaries, new weapons and rnods, plasmids, tonics, and even a character which gradually degrades from a healthy individual into the kind of spliced-up monster you'll recognize from having bashed their faces in for two entire games.

MP acts as a prequel to the original *BioShock* and positions you as a citizen of Rapture, fighting the war between Ryan and Fontai—uh, Atlas. You even get your own prefall of Rapture apartment, which could be the most seductive bit of environment design in either game.

While the PC version is in dire need of a patch, it still represents hugely creative, rewarding design that goes one step beyond simply offering you unlocks as you play. Use these tips to win the day and ease the pain of lag and wonky matchmaking.

1 "Death-Matched"?

The lure of *BioShock 2* multiplayer's plot-related treats should attract some who aren't familiar with the basics of arena shooters. To get started, turn down your mouse sensitivity until your aiming is laser-precise, and then always, *always* aim for the head. If there are enemies around, imagine you're under fire even when you're not—that means continually sprinting while weaving like a drunkard on roller skates. Mainly, though, it's about practice, so don't get discouraged.

2 "Okay! Got it!"

Wait! I'm not finished! A good way of not getting discouraged is not dying, so make the most of the fact that this is a game with hugely generous health regeneration. After a kill, take a moment to catch your breath before moving into the next room, and enter fights already thinking about your exit route, should it start going badly. Remember, in the team-based Civil War, each of your deaths gets the enemy team closer to the score limit. Staying alive is as important as scoring kills.

3 On Rubbernecking

An interesting feature of the multiplayer is the ability to research the dead body of another player, which gets you 15 percent damage bonus against them, and lasts until they personally kill you. If the bonus was 10 percent or lasted until you died, its worth would be debatable, but 15 percent is *huge*, and you can inflict the pain of your bonus damage while it lasts. Equip the Master Researcher tonic you unlock at rank 3, which drops research time further, and never unequip it.

4 Sweet release

The next four tips cover the four most nuanced plasmids, but first know that you can charge up most plasmids by holding the left trigger, just like in single-player. Resist the temptation to actually do so, though, unless you know where your opponent is and can charge up before ducking through the door. In multiplayer, walking around fully charged drains your Eve and lowers your gun, which isn't worth it in terms of pure damage per second.

5 Arson abounds

Four things about the Incineration plasmid are worth keeping in mind. One: Setting fire to anyone will slightly increase their movement speed. Two: Aero Dash, Geyser Trap and Winter Blast extinguish fire. Three: Burning individuals set fire to oil, their own team-mates *and* yours. Four: Dangerous and attractive as it might seem, this plasmid is best used from a distance as a sniping aid. An out-of-control blaze could end up hurting your team as much as theirs.

6 Sub-Zero to Hero

Winter Blast is far more versatile. Slowing down enemies isn't as instantly attractive as setting them alight, but you'll increase, rather than lower, your chances of scoring some follow-up headshots. Winter Blast can also freeze turrets, hacked vending machines and even doors. After getting the hang of freezing doors behind you when fleeing on a door-choked map (like the Medical Pavilion), you'll enjoy a healthy jump in your survival rate.

7 In-flight entertainment

Aero Dash is a rank 4 plasmid that lets you rocket forward, knocking down any enemies in your path. Like Winter Blast, it's as useful as you are cunning. Sprinting into frozen enemies shatters them and makes melee backstabs infinitely more attainable, as well as making escapes (with or without a Little Sister in tow) or journeys to a capture point that much quicker.

8 Disappearing act

Effective uses of the Houdini plasmid, which turns you invisible, include tagging along with a team mate until they engage the enemy (then sneaking around behind the target to score a backstab while he's distracted), or dedicating yourself to pursuing the Sister in any of the Little Sister capturing modes. Just remember that giggling in the shadows doesn't help your team.

9 Come to Daddy

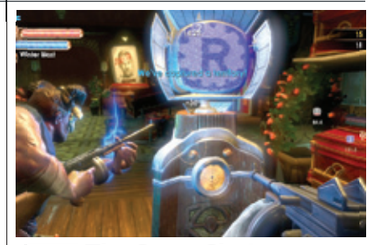
Memorize where the Big Daddy suit spawns and actively hang around that area. Little picture: You get 50 Adam off the bat for becoming a Big Daddy. Big picture: You'll end up pulverizing the other team instead of them doing it to you. Once you're a Daddy, play to survive, hang around teammates, aim for mid-range confrontations and be sure to fling out all six of your proximity mines (ideally, just behind doors and around corners). They'll stay where you toss them.

10 Popping Mr. Bubbles

Remember when I said not to charge your plasmids unless you know where your enemy is? You always know where big, stompy Big Daddy is. Charge up, pop out, fire it off, get in a few headshots and then melt away. The rivet gun you're up against is as mean as my mother, so stay out of the crosshairs. if you feel like testing your luck, try to best amateur Big Daddies by getting close and circling them, but beware of pros—they'll stun you with a stomp then rivet your spine to the wall.

11 Boot Camping

If you're ready to start talking advanced tactics, you can use your own Geyser Traps and Aero Dash to reach inaccessible locations to camp from (with *BS2*'s cyclical map design, you'll likely get shot in the back standing still anywhere else). Also, remember that a few swings with your melee weapon will get rid of insect swarms, and the smallest trickles of water will put out fires. But don't bother with the Sabotage, Metabolic Eve or Repairman tonics—they're terrible.



12 The Great Chain

Wait—did I really leave this for last? Stick together with your team at *all costs*. You're not playing a lone-wolf-friendly game; the crosshairs are too broad for that. Two players shooting up someone paralyzed with Electro Bolt or Winter Blast will shred them in a heartbeat, and tag-team-style play can keep pressure up rather than letting your enemies recover health. Do all this and maybe you'll arrive at the special cutscene that unlocks at rank 40, with a touch of your sanity intact.

SKILLS

KEEP EVERYONE ALIVE IN MASS EFFECT 2'S FINALE

A LIVING CREW IS A PRODUCTIVE CREW

1 Before leaving through the Omega 4 relay, make sure you've recruited everybody (they're almost all loyal), and purchased the armor, shield and weapon upgrades for the Normandy.

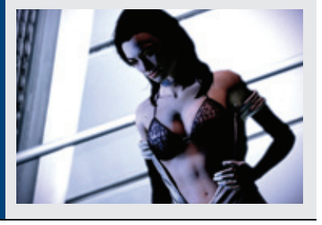
2 For the tech expert, pick Tali or Legion. For team leaders, always pick either Garrus, Miranda or Jacob. For the biotic expert, choose either your Asari or Jack. Never select disloyal crewmembers.

3 For the final defense, the game calculates the combined defensive ability of everyone you leave behind, so be sure to leave behind intergalactic beefcakes Garrus, Grunt and Zaeed.

BONUS SKILL

OH CAPTAIN! MY CAPTAIN!

You can seduce Jack, Miranda, Tali, Kelly Chambers, Garrus, Thane or Jacob. You can even sleep with Morinth, but you won't survive to brag about it.



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A30 Audio System

Astro Gaming

Astro's A40 Audio System (97%, April 2008) might have been improved by including a small pet goat that coughed up wads of $20 bills every time you spanked it; other than that, they were—and are—perfect for gamers who want a headset that does more than just reproduce great sound in games. Two years later, Astro's rolling out the A30 Audio System that includes a few tweaks and a slightly lower price (still no goat).

The A30s are much lighter and slimmer than the A40s for a less-douchey look on the subway. The earcups still rotate flat against your chest when not in use, and the new "supra-aural" earcups rest gently on top of your ears rather than around them; they're comfy, even after hours of continuous troubadour-stabbing in *Assassin's Creed 2*, and leave your ears drier as well.

And the sound is just about as good as you'll ever get without actually being aboard the SSV *Normandy* while the ship is buzz-sawed into pieces by the Collectors. Like their predecessors, the frequency response tuning on the A30s is sharp, but not so heavy-handed as to discolor—for lack of a better word—music you've listened to for years. And you'll be listening to that music in all kinds of unexpected places, thanks to the unique MixAmp that lets you jack in your iPod and squirt your own soundtrack over any game, as well as adjust the game and voice volume balance, and even chain A30s together for lag-free, full-duplex communication. And while the A30's boom mic can only be attached to the left side of the set, there's an additional in-line microphone embedded in the Quick Disconnect (QD) cables for quick hit-and-run post-match insults.

My complaint with the system is on behalf of eyeglass wearers everywhere—the earcups can exert pressure on your ears over the earpieces on your glasses (and for this, we have Lasik).

I have a slight preference for the A40s with their roomier cups, but I'd be far more likely to pack the A30s if I were on the run from the law. And while they're both expensive, the way I see it, nothing's more expensive than money spent on hardware you don't love.

$230 ($150 headset only), astrogaming.com

PC GAMER EDITOR'S CHOICE ★★★★★

VERDICT

Just about the perfect gaming headset, though not necessarily a big improvement on the older, pricier A40s.

PC GAMER 96

WHAT'S IN THE BOX

WoW Wireless Headset

Creative

Imagine an orc. In a teleporter. But just before teleportation begins, a Creative headset flies in. *Zap*. Out comes a wonderful headset infused with a dose of *World of Warcraft* DNA. It didn't happen *exactly* like that, but almost.

Creative's *WoW*-themed headset boasts enormous-yet-mysteriously-comfortable earcups that cover your ears like oven mitts without putting too much pressure on your temples or glasses, and you can wear them with or without the bendy-mic attached on the left. They're wireless, with a reach of about 25 feet within line-of-sight. And they sound terrific—positional audio is quite good, and music emerges bright and unmolested. Mic quality isn't the best, but usable for most VOIP needs.

Orc/headphone fusions are bound to have a few warts. The volume buttons rocket from silent to *liquefying* in a split second, and there's also no battery level indicator, so you never know when the set will blink out—though our tests show it will happen after roughly nine hours.

Exchangeable side plates with software-adjustable backlighting are fine additions, but our favorite feature is the VoiceFX technology that alters the sound of your voice in real time. Your voice isn't merely pitch-shifted; it's transformed to sound as authentic as, say, a female gnome is ever going to sound.

Creative could have squeezed out a cheap tie-in. Instead, it delivered a meaty piece of hardware that any *WoW* player would fight and die for.

$160 wireless / $120 wired, creative.com

VERDICT

A comfortable, quality headset that sounds great with audio of all types, not just for cries of "For the Horde!".

PC GAMER 90

PC GAMER EDITOR'S CHOICE ★★★★★

ALSO RAN

Able Planet True Fidelity NC300B $130

With no built-in microphone, you won't be using these for barking out orders in *ArmA II*, but on weekend mornings with a laptop running *Torchlight* in the backyard, they're just the thing. Pop in a AAA battery and the noise-cancellation circuitry blocks out cabin noise, chatter, people screaming for help—all kinds of urban distractions—with just a bit of white noise at low volumes giving it away. Hardcore gamers should stick with hardcore gaming headsets, but travelers and students have a hi-fi friend in these pups. 79

ableplanet.com

Razer Megalodon $150

Like Creative's *WoW* headset, the Megalodon busts out with virtual 7.1 surround sound. But unlike the other guy, the Megalodon bakes its sound in its own breakout box, not in your PC. In theory, this should lighten your CPU load somewhat, but at the very least, you won't need drivers wherever you want to get the full benefit of the positional effects (which seemed a hair less wooly as well). The sound is boomy and intense without spontaneously remixing your media. 86

razerzone.com

Ear Force Z1 $30

You don't expect much hardware for $30 these days, which is perhaps why the Ear Force Z1's sound so damn good. OK, so they crumple like tissue paper at the low end and at high volumes. But otherwise, they reproduce gunfire and sword clashes as well as they do hi-hats and Meg Ryan's tears. The undetachable mic rotates out of the way and stays there, and the earcups fold into the arch for travel or flat on your chest for that $300/hr. turntablist look. Perfect for netbook generals. 82

turtlebeach.com

www.WorldMags.net & www.aDowns.net

TESTED

Avalanche

LanSlide Gaming PCs

Unless you've got a mighty gaming laptop, going to a LAN party means schlepping components back and forth and dropping at least one of them along the way with a heart-breaking thunk. LanSlide Gaming PCs intends to change all that by taking a cue from the camel—the toughest beast of burden on the planet—and gathering everything into two, easily transportable humps.

The first is the handsome CPU, not much larger or heavier than a box of wine, which has clear sides on the top and left and a spring-loaded handle in the center. The handle is smooth, comfortable and retracts quickly when released without undue violence. If you've ever tried to tuck a Shuttle system under your arm, you know why this is good. The second is the LanSlide PC-Pack, a light-weight, rugged backpack with padded straps that contains

I could easily walk for hours with it fully loaded if I didn't think walking was for chumps.

everything else. That includes the 19-inch widescreen display, Logitech mouse and keyboard and a Creative Fatal1ty Gaming Headset—no small load for a single backpack. But the PC-Pack's softly padded pockets hold all that, plus cables, while still being quite comfortable to carry; I could easily walk for hours with it fully loaded if I didn't think walking was for chumps.

Thankfully, the case is still roomy enough for a single HD 5870. Paired up with a stock Core i7-930, the benchmarks were good but not extraordinary, with low synthetic benchmark scores more than offset by good performance in actual games (particularly for the price). The Avalanche will easily hold its own at any LAN party, while humiliating laptop-luggers and making your competitors green with envy when you pass them by as they're picking up little pieces of their display.

$1,685, lanslidegamingpcs.com

VERDICT

It won't blow the doors off the place performace-wise, but you will stylishly fit through the doors wearing it on your back.

PC GAMER 82

SPEC ◆ **CPU** Core i7-930 2.8GHz ◆ **RAM** 6GB DDR3 ◆ **GPU** ATI Radeon HD 5870 ◆ **Storage** 7,200RPM HD ◆ **Case** Custom ◆ **OS** Win 7 Home Premium 64-bit ◆ **3DMark06/Vantage** 11276/12406 ◆ **Crysis** 59.1 fps ◆ **SupCom** WNR (at 1680x1050)

Q&A

Quick Fixes

Q: I have a Dell desktop that I bought about four years ago, which I recently upgraded to Windows 7 Pro (32-bit). When I was running XP, my computer generally hovered around 60 percent CPU utilization when I was playing games. Since upgrading to Win 7, this figure has rocketed up to 98-100 percent. In addition, my loading times have greatly increased and I get frequent stutters where the screen will freeze for three to four seconds before returning to normal. Is this decrease in performance to be expected when switching to Win 7? ***Paul Baker***

TMI on your CPU.

A: *This is all very, very wrong. At most, you should expect a 5 percent performance penalty moving from XP to Win 7 (and performance increases are not unusual). Windows 7 is, however, still a relatively young operating system, and drivers are still being whipped into shape. Here's what I recommend: First, make sure you've installed all the required updates through Windows update. Next, download and install the latest drivers for your videocard, as well as the latest chipset drivers for your motherboard. Double-check that the drivers you're downloading are intended for Windows 7 32-bit. Now try playing again to see if your performance is up to snuff.*

Q: UPDATE: After a bit of searching (and a handy little program called CPUID), I found my motherboard specs and downloaded new drivers for it. The video card turned out to have been up to date, but with the chipset update, I'm now running *Modern Warfare 2* at twice the resolution and about 40 percent CPU load. Who knew one little thing could have such an impact! ***PB***

A: *I did! Readers can find CPUID at www.cpuid.com.*

Hard Stuff Trinity

DREAM SYSTEM		MID-RANGE		ENTRY-LEVEL	
CASE AND PSU Cooler Master Cosmos; 850W PSU	$423	**CASE AND PSU** Nzxt Alpha: Ocz Gamexstream 700W PSU	$175	**CASE AND PSU** Generic Case; Corsair 450W PSU	$161
PROCESSOR Intel Core i7-950 3.06GHz	$555	**PROCESSOR** Intel Core i7-920 2.66GHz	$270	**PROCESSOR** AMD Athlon X2 6000+ 3.0GHz	$59
MOTHERBOARD Asus P6T Deluxe V2	$270	**MOTHERBOARD** Asus P6T	$234	**MOTHERBOARD** Asus M3A76-CM	$68
MEMORY Corsair 6GBDDR3-1600	$155	**MEMORY** Corsair 6GB DDR3-1333	$165	**MEMORY** Corsair 2GB DDR2-800	$69
OPTICAL DRIVE LG Who8LS20Blu-ray	$179	**OPTICAL DRIVE** LG GH22NP20	$31	**OPTICAL DRIVE** Sony DDU1681S	$26
HARD DRIVE Intel X25-M 80GB SSD; WD 500GB 7200RPM	$311	**HARD DRIVE** WD 500GB 720RPM	$50	**HARD DRIVE** WD 250GB 7200RPM	$38
SOUNDCARD Creative Labs X-Fi Titanium	$96	**SOUNDCARD** Onboard	$0	**SOUNDCARD** Onboard	$0
VIDEOCARD Radeon HD5870 (2)	$814	**VIDEOCARD** Radeon HD 5870	$407	**VIDEOCARD** GeForce GT 220	$70
TOTAL PRICE	**$2,803**	**TOTAL PRICE**	**$1,332**	**TOTAL PRICE**	**$491**

TESTED

The Peregrine

Iron Will Innovations

The peregrine falcon is the fastest creature on Earth, reaching top speeds of up to 200mph (you can check out laid-back falcons nesting at bit.ly/ddfNFC). The Peregrine is a lightweight, stretchy, mesh glove with a magnetically-attached, wired USB interface that makes executing simple

commands cool-looking but needlessly difficult. Am I missing something?

The technology, which replaces your keyboard as a controller, works very well—touch the coiled wires that run along the fingers to any of the embedded contact points along the fingers, thumb and palm to send a command—and I can imagine how useful this glove would be in many applications. But none of them is gaming. There's just no way that awkward hand gestures, like touching

your thumb to the center of your little finger or your index finger to your palm, are as simple, comfortable or fast as a keyboard. The last straw is the lack of support for multiple inputs.

But we tried anyway. Playing *Counter-Strike* was an instant disaster: moving forward meant that we couldn't jump, strafe or use items. Even playing *World of Warcraft* had poor results—the awkwardness of trying to remember where all our spells were assigned and trying to switch targets while moving was a terror. Yes, we'd improve with practice, but for what benefit?

The problem isn't that the glove doesn't work. The problem is that it *does* work, and proves itself to be utterly useless for gaming. Don't give this glove a hand.

PC GAMER 26

$150, theperegrine.com

www.WorldMags.net & www.aDowns.net

CSI: DIABLO

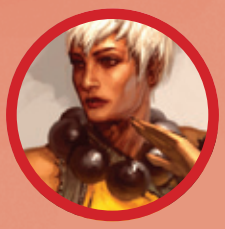
What is **DIABLO III**'s fifth and final character class? The *PC Gamer* Class Speculation & Investigation team assembles the available clues

1. THE CONFIRMED CLASSES

Witch Doctor

Hurls firebomb grenades, drains life, summons zombie dogs and locust swarms. The new Necromancer, basically.

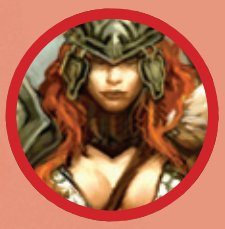
Roles filled: ***ranged, summoning, control, tribal***



Monk

Quick dash-attacks, exploding palm strikes, multi-hit combos. Wouldn't be out of place in *Street Fighter*.

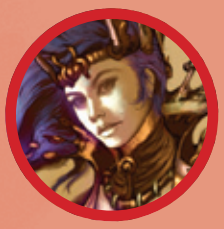
Roles filled: ***melee, defense, oversized necklace-wearer***



Barbarian

D3's Vikingesque, dual-wielding, ground-pounding, wearing-skulls-as-a-hat brute. Once drank mead out of a goat.

Roles filled: ***melee, crowd control, "The Muscle"***



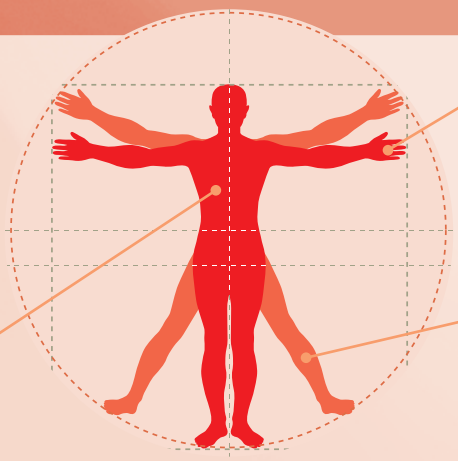
Wizard

Electrocution, teleportation, magic-missilin', time manipulation. Elemental spell-slinging for the *Harry Potter* set.

Roles filled: ***ranged, magic, wand-user***

2. MISSING TRAITS

Deduction! By examining the existing classes we can infer what combat mechanics the fifth one might call upon.



Holy

Other than the soft-spoken, vaguely do-gooding Monk, none of *D3*'s classes exude the kind of Heaven lovin' that we associate with a hero that'd walk straight into Hell to pull out the Devil's pancreas.

Rogue-like

Bows. Traps. *Quivers.* Monsters in *Diablo* and *Diablo II* have always dropped these items like piñatas—if there wasn't a class to wield some of these items, what would we do with all our loot?

Not magical, not martial

Of the known four classes, two are hand-to-handers, and two are magic-users. We'd wager that a fifth class will fill a role jn between—a utility character, like an engineer of traps and status effects, perhaps?

3. SUSPECTS

From this evidence, our all-seeing, fact-inventing supercomputer has produced three possible personas for *D3*'s final class.

The Battle Nun

(34% Probability)

Holier than God's jellybeans, more wrathful than a torcano (a rare event when a tornado sucks up a volcano to hurl terrifying magma-wind), a sister with combat skill would slot well into a gray area that's neither too divine nor too martial. They've been done before, too: one of the factions in *Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War—Soulstorm* are the Sisters of Battle, flamethrower-toting nuns.

The Sniper

(78% Probability)

Bows are a fundamental instrument in a *Diablo* game. But wouldn't a straight-up Ranger rogue be a little too passé? A more military version of an arrow user might give the archer role a new face. We can rule out alternate bow-pullers like the Amazon, since each of *D3*'s classes will have male and female versions.

The Witch Hunter

(84% Probability)

D3 is deviating from any straight-laced classes that would be introduced by flag-festooned trumpets. But at the same time, it's lacking a knight archetype. A sword-and-shield character with a mercenary tint might work—think Alistair in *Dragon Age: Origins* with a meaner, more Geralt-like (*The Witcher*) demeanor.

Photos ©iStockphoto.com/members as follows: magnifier–Andyd; Vitruvian Man–johnwoodcock; nun–bobbieo; archer–Mike_Kiev; knight–FXQuadro

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